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Armenian Iranian identities in the institutional home visit: A case study

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Armenian Iranian identities in the institutional home visit: A case study

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Abstract

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In recent years, many ethnic Armenians from Iran have come to the US as refugees, resettling in a diverse landscape that already includes large Armenian and Iranian diaspora communities. Soon after arrival, they also interface with US institutions in a home visit from a refugee resettlement case worker. In this thesis I adopt constructivist understandings of identity-in-interaction to examine the identity work that older Armenian Iranian immigrants do during these visits, reproduced here as life history interviews. I argue that Armenian Iranians use the home visit to discursively construct an Armenian Iranian identity that addresses the tension between institutional and community pressure to represent themselves as uniquely discriminated against in Iranian society while still identifying with an Iranian national identity. The more localized and temporary identities and interactional roles that speakers – including the researcher – adopt in the interviews also contribute to gender asymmetries in the interactions to the effect that men most often command the floor. Therefore, while the home visit format provides insight into the ways Armenian Iranians articulate an identity that is at least in part "Iranian" amidst normative pressures to do otherwise, it can also translate into an interaction that privileges men's perspectives and allows them to largely determine its direction and content.

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Transliteration and Transcription Conventions

For this paper I have adopted the International Society for Iranian Studies transliteration conventions: http://www.iranian-studies.com/journal/transliteration.

Italicized text in the excerpts is the original Persian, and parentheses in English text are for phrases or words that have no direct English equivalent. I have tried to represent the most relevant paralinguistic features of the original Persian speech and have attempted to place it where it makes the most sense had the sentence been uttered in English.

[ ] descriptions of nonverbal acts by participants

( ) speech that is implied or otherwise has no direct equivalent in English

(.) pause of less than half a second

(..) pause of half a second or more

. a full stop, as in the completion of a sentence

: extension of the preceding sound

< > talk that overlaps with that of another speaker on the next line

Introduction

In the introduction to a volume of essays on intergroup communication in urban societies, John J. Gumperz and Jenny Cook-Gumperz point out that post-industrial Western societies are "characterized by the bureaucratization of public institutions and by the increasingly pervasive penetration of these institutions into the day-to-day lives of individuals" (1982: 3-4). The increasing inescapability of agencies and institutions that affect people's lives and the necessity of communicative competence to navigate these systems means that "the ability to manage or adapt to diverse communicative situations has become essential" (1982: 4). While this constant adaptation can be daunting enough in a society in which one feels "at home," migration to an entirely new sociocultural context intensifies this occasionally fraught relationship between people and institutions and magnifies the importance of adaptibility in communicative situations. Much scholarship in recent decades has also investigated how, in this "age of identity," (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 608) processes of globalization and migration can bear on the way identities are "constructed, negotiated, and lived within (but also outside) transnational communities" (De Fina and Perrino 2013: 510).

In light of this tradition of scholarly inquiry into identity, communicative practices, and migration in diverse post-industrial societies, this thesis applies an ethnographic approach to the communicative practices of Armenian Iranian immigrants in the United States at the intersection of identity, public institutions, prevailing ideologies, and private, personal space. Both an ethnic and a religious minority in Iran, Armenian Iranians come to the US as refugees and find that they must navigate both

Armenian and Iranian diaspora communities in the US that have their own ideas about the place of Armenian Iranians among these two larger groups. Armenian Iranians also interface with the larger US institutional apparatus that grants them refugee status through home visits from a case worker in the employ of a refugee resettlement agency. In this thesis I examine these home visits as an interactional whole, an event during which Armenian Iranian immigrants in the US navigate a diverse complex of communities and ideologies through the discursive construction of identities.

Migration out of Iran in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution in 1978-79 and during the Iran-Iraq War from 1980-1988 resulted in a sizable Iranian diaspora population taking shape in North America and Europe (Hakimzadeh 2006). Diaspora communities abroad are known for "challenging national cultures' aspiration to sociocultural unity," (Ben-Rafael 2013: 842), a national ideal of which identity is a crucial aspect. Identity appears to be no less salient for ethnic Armenians from Iran who migrate to the US, where they become further "deterritorialized" (Appadurai 1996: 48), suddenly finding themselves members of several different diaspora groups. The identity work done by older Armenian Iranians in a conversation about themselves and their community soon after arrival to the US can thus provide further insight into how transnational individuals "exposed to the contradictions of in-betweenness and hybridity" (De Fina and Perrino 2013: 512) negotiate and come to terms with the various tensions and paradoxes associated with this further diasporic destabilization.

One of the central tensions animating the identities that emerge in these interviews begins with the expectation on behalf of US society and institutions that

Armenian Iranians fit the stereotype of an Iranian refugee fleeing the Islamic Republic government (Khosravi 2010), namely that of a desperate, downtrodden community beseeching Western democracies to deliver them (and, by extension, deal a blow to the evil governments oppressing them). Since Armenian Iranians receive refugee status based on a presumed degree of discrimination and persecution in contemporary Iranian society, a home visit from a white case worker serving as a stand-in for both the institution and mainstream US society can at least in part provide a chance to respond to the implicit demands that they perform this role of a refugee. Some members of the Iranian diaspora at large also resent Armenian Iranians for what they see as an undeserved easy path to US citizenship, arguing that the discrimination that Armenian Iranians face doesn't compare to the systematic persecution of, for example, Iran's Baha'i religious minority.

As both Christians and non-native speakers of Persian, Armenians have lived on the margins in Iran as an "eternal Other" (Gheytanchi 2007: 174) for hundreds of years, weathering the various ups and downs as government power centralized and changed hands and rulers implemented modernist nation-building projects that emphasized Persian as Iran's national language and Shi'i Islam as its primary religion. However, although Armenian Iranians share a mutually intelligible albeit somewhat dissimilar variety of Armenian with Armenians from diverse parts of the Armenian diaspora – including Armenia, Iraq, Lebanon, and Turkey, to name a few – all of the participants in this study express that they align more closely with Iranian nationals in the US. Armenian Iranians thus articulate an identity that they feel has relatively little to do with the

Armenian diaspora outside of a shared language, but rather has a distinctly Iranian component.

The central questions of this project can therefore be phrased thusly: With what interactional goals do Armenian Iranians enter the home visit? To what constraints, ideologies, and discourses do they seem to respond, and how do they resist all the above? How do they situate themselves among other established Iranian or Armenian groups in the US, with what aspects of an Iranian national identity do they align, and how do they do this using language? Also, what implications do the more temporary and gender-relevant ways of articulating identity have for how the interaction proceeds and how Armenian Iranians interface with US institutions?

I argue that Armenian Iranians use the home visit primarily to articulate an identity that addresses the tensions discussed above. They use the opportunity of the home visit itself to frame conversations as an exploration of Armenian Iranian identity, and they reorient toward this general theme from time to time. Through collaborative tellings of historical narratives and events, the spouses in these interviews construct a reinterpreted history of the Armenians in Iran that begins not in Armenia, but in Esfahan, Iran. They also emphasize the original Armenian migration to Iran as organic and even desirable rather than forced, making a case for Armenians in Iran as a natural part of a diverse constellation of pan-Iranian ethnic groups. Through personal anecdotes about life in Iran under the Islamic Republic as religious minorities, they distance themselves from what they characterize as religious fundamentalism in general while identifying with some of Iran's more timeless, uncontroversial, positive aspects, including its natural

beauty and literary and cultural heritage. When personal anecdotes explicitly address encounters with agents of the state, they emphasize their solidarity with ordinary Iranians by invoking the universal marginality of all Iranians living under a fundamentally repressive system.

The more local, temporary identities all speakers in the interviews adopt also bear not only on how the interaction proceeds, but in whose favor it does so. The men in these interviews overwhelmingly command the floor, and I argue that this is due to several factors: For one, the women for the most part took up the duties associated with standards of Iranian hospitality, meaning that they were often on their feet getting drinks or something to eat. This meant not only that women were often away from the table, but that the time I spent alone with my male interlocutor allowed us to establish a more direct connection and pursue lines of dialogue, the beginning of which the women had not been around to hear. The men in these interviews also used a range of discursive and interactional resources for casting themselves as the primary storytellers and myself as the learner. Finally, I show how I also contributed to these gender asymmetries in conversation in my capacity as a male researcher.

To make sense of these emerging identities I draw from contemporary sociocultural linguistic notions of identity as "the social positioning of the self and other" (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 586), not as a fixed psychological category preceding language use, but rather as an achievement in interaction and an accomplishment of primarily linguistic choices in real life contexts. In examining Armenian Iranians' emergent identities as individuals, spouses, and members of a speech community, as well as how

they are embedded in and in dialogue with sociocultural and historical narratives, events, and ideologies (Bucholtz and Hall 2008: 152), I adopt a general discourse analytic[1] approach in analyzing the data here. A variety of theoretical discussions on and analytical frameworks for identities in interaction have also informed my understanding of identity and my analysis of the interviews (e.g. Auer 2007; Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Georgakopoulou 2007). Additionally, the large body of sociocultural linguistic work on narrative organization and discourse features has assisted me in identifying salient examples of creative language use to index identities and contextualize interactions. In concentrating on certain themes and patterns in my analysis, I have also attempted to seek out above all those aspects of the interview situation itself to which the study's participants appear to orient most often or which they otherwise appear to deem the most salient (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992: 4).

This research follows a longstanding project within sociolinguistics and lingusitic anthropology of reflexivity regarding the succcesses and failures of one's own methodology, particularly that of interviews. Charles Briggs was among those who brought this issue to light in a highly influential book (1986). He stressed that the differing metacommunicative routines of interviewer and interviewee can have consequences for how an interview proceeds, arguing that a failure to understand native metacommunicative routines can even lead to totally fruitless interviews. As I mentioned,

[1] *A Dictionary of Sociolinguistics* (Swann, et al 2004: 83) identifies three broad usages of "discourse:" 1) "a stretch of language longer than a single sentence or utterance;" 2) "a type of language used in a particular context, for example…(classroom discourse);" 3) The "capital D" discourses normally associated with Foucault. As I analyze discourse at various levels, all three uses feature in this study, but I have tried to be clear about the intended meaning.

even though it was something I had anticipated, planned for, and tried to manage during the interviews, the men who participated in this study ultimately contributed more than the women. This raises questions both about what aspects of the methodology resulted in these assymetrical contributions and about the place of the researcher's own position and ideological commitments in the practice of research. Additionally, this study is a response to a dearth of ethnographically-informed research on Iran's religious minorities and older migrants to the US. I also hope that qualitative research that provides insight into the metacommunicative routines and telling practices of older immigrants can further strengthen the dialogue between various interdisciplinary traditions involved in applied research with the aim of improving older people's lives.

In Chapter One, I summarize my methodological approach, note some ethical considerations, establish the study's theoretical grounding as an investigation of identity construction in interaction, and comment briefly on this study's engagement with other interdisciplinary traditions. In Chapter Two, I introduce the Armenian Iranians and describe in more detail the historical and sociocultural context in which this research took place. This includes more detailed background information on the Armenian population in Iran and the means by which they come to the US as refugees. I also explain more thoroughly how I came to my interview methodology and how I have carried it out, and I mention some basic biographical information of the study's participants.

Chapter Three deals mainly with how Armenian Iranians use the home visit to construct an identity that addresses the tensions I mention above. As I show, participants made "Armenian Iranian identity" the topical focus of the interviews, and therefore I

have attempted to unpack the complicated ways in which speakers are positioning themselves and others both through explicit comments and through illustrative narratives to contribute to a discursive construction of ethnic identity. Chapter Four treats the more localized, temporary aspects of identity in interaction, specifically its gender-relevant aspects.

Chapter One

Introduction: Ethnographic foundations

In the most basic sense, ethnography is an anthropological research method by which "one human tries to make sense out of a second human for the benefit of a third." (Agar 2010) However, anthropologists have long conceptualized ethnography as both a *process* and a *product* (Agar 1990), a model which has attracted necessary critical attention to the methodological considerations of the ethnographic process and the question of representation and audience raised by the ethnographic product. Ethnography is thus at once the sustained observation of and participation in at least part of the day-to-day activities of a community of people who share a set of attitudes or attributes as well as the text that is its ultimate product. Carrying out these methods of observation and participation systematically and documenting the findings allows the researcher to explore specific cultural narratives, beliefs, and practices, particularly those accomplished through dialogue and within everyday interactions.

As this study is first and foremost an ethnographic investigation of language practices among a speech community (Morgan 2004) of elderly Armenian Iranian migrants in Glendale, California, I have relied heavily upon programmatic writing about ethnographic methods by Alessandro Duranti for a specifically linguistic anthropological perspective and to gain an understanding of the logic of research methodology (1997) and Russell Bernard for a more general, technical overview of methods (2011). As I will explain in further detail in the next chapter, I also rely on my years of experience working with this community to provide the details of the ethnographic context and my main data-

gathering methods are participant interviews and participant observation supplemented by the typed transcripts of the same as well as field notes in which I recorded my observations.

Practices of engagement and representation in anthropology

Ethnographic researchers must deal in one way or another with a number of tensions and contradictions inherent in the research and writing process, all with inseparable ethical and methodological dimensions. Reflexivity, or "the constant awareness, assessment, and reassessment by the researcher of the researcher's own contribution/influence/shaping of intersubjective research and the consequent research findings," (Salzman, 2002) is thought of as an effective way to address the asymmetries between the fieldworker and the community under investigation and to challenge the "dualisms, abstractions, and detachment of positivism" (Stacey, 1988: 21). Feminist scholars in particular have argued for the merits of reflexivity as part of an "egalitarian research process characterized by authenticity, reciprocity, and intersubjectivity between the researcher and her 'subjects'" (Stacey, 1988: 22), itself part of a broad antagonistic stance toward neopositivist empiricism and its emphasis on objectivity and value-free research (England, 1994).

However, Salzman (2002) argues that the principle of reflexivity itself has been adopted rather uncritically by the institution, and he calls for a discussion about its limitations and its proper application in research and in the textual product, a problem for which I found myself seeking answers in the early stages of this project. Salzman identifies "reflexive declarations" (2002: 809) about one's own ethnicity, gender, and

class as one of the main contemporary applications of reflexivity in research and, after citing psychological sources to question the very degree to which self-reporting can even be believed, challenges in particular the notion that revealing biographical details about oneself in the abstract necessarily lends a greater understanding to how the researcher's subjectivity bears on the research subjects and context. Salzman suggests that value of analytical reflexivity is in fact in examining the specific instances in which the researcher's positionality bears on *occurrences* in the research situation or the situation itself, rather than as an abstract declaration from which readers are supposed to make various inferences. Therefore, although I have tried to adopt a general mindfulness toward my own positionality as it bears on my theoretical and methodological perspectives, the research participants, the whole of the research and fieldwork process, and the writing stage, it is chiefly in the way it bears on events in the research process that I wish to explore it.

Another longstanding issue in anthropological research that seems superficially to weigh more on methodological concerns is the tension between getting close enough to a culture to obtain an intimate, empathetic understanding of its practices and logic (Clifford, 1986: 1-26) while at the same time maintaining the distance necessary for reigning in one's own biases as much as possible and putting the researcher's ultimate entextualization of culture into dialogue with existing scholarship (Bucholtz, 2007). Maintaining this balance requires constant attention to a variety of perspectives, and Duranti thus argues that successful ethnography depends not only on "written description of the social organization, social activities, symbolic and material resources, and

interpretive practices characteristic of a particular group of people" (1997: 85) but also on establishing a "dialogue between different viewpoints and voices, including those of the people studied, of the ethnographer, and of his disciplinary and theoretical preferences" (87).

Increased mindfulness towards this diversity of points-of-view is also a key aspect of phenomenological methodology. Similar to the feminist methods alluded to above, phenomenological methods in anthropology emphasize the cooperative, intersubjective aspect of research as well as the reflection of this multiplicity of voices and perspectives in the final text. Phenomenological research also strives for a thorough understanding of human experiences primarily via their articulation by the subjects who experience them, seeking to find explanations for them only secondarily (Dukes, 1984). Desjarlais and Throop identify part of the phenomenological approach's value for ethical and meaningful anthropological inquiry in its emphasis on "(destabilizing) those unexamined assumptions that organize our prereflective engagements with reality," also known as "bracketing the 'natural attitude': that attitude in which we assume there to be a world that exists independently of our experience of it" (Desjarlais and Throop, 2011: 88). In terms of interpreting sociocultural linguistic phenomena and uncovering the "structural invariants of a particular type of human experience" (Dukes, 1984: 201), conscious, continuous attempts to bracket what one "knows" helps the researcher avoid jumping to the obvious conclusion and put aside any immediate urge to uncover an explanation of an event or an experience and instead reach for a more detailed understanding of it.

Any attempt to engage rigorously and ethically with research participants who belong to a culture other than that of the researcher must also include consideration of transcription practices, which bears heavily on the finished product and its inevitable audience. In an influential article locating a major problem of developmental psycholinguistic studies of children in haphazard transcription practices, Elinor Ochs argued that the transcription process is an inherently selective one subject to the cultural biases with which the researcher approaches them (1979). In fact, Ochs argues, since transcriptions *are* the data (1979: 44-45), even the most sophisticated and thorough audio and video recordings only delay the inherently selective act of observation until the researcher sits down to transcribe (1979: 44). Mary Bucholtz too has argued that transcription is a "socioculturally embedded linguistic and metalinguistic practice" (2007: 785) given inherently to variation, and that therefore striving for an understanding of the consequences of this variation is more useful than striving for complete accuracy. Ochs concedes that this selectivity cannot be avoided, but she encourages researchers to not to "random and implicit" filtering but rather produce a transcript that "reflect(s) the particular interests – the hypotheses to be examined – of the researcher" (Ochs, 1979: 44).

When considering the implications of ethnographic engagement and representation, I find it helpful to bear in mind Agar's "three humans" from his commentary on ethnography cited above. Although they by no means constitute mutually exclusive categories, researcher, subject, and audience will undoubtedly approach any ethnographic text or cross-cultural encounter with their own histories, life experiences,

ideas, and biases. Even though "the research product is ultimately that of the researcher" (Stacey, 1988: 24) it is still the responsibility of the ethnographer to be mindful of the situatedness of knowledge and the sociocultural, historical, and political variability inherent in these various perspectives throughout the research and writing processes, not only as part of one's efforts to produce thorough scholarship, but also because any attempt at ethical ethnographic inquiry demands it.

Sociocultural lingustic conceptions of identity

The centrality of identity to contemporary linguistic anthropological scholarship is such that in 2004, Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall claimed that "in many ways, the study of linguistic anthropology is the study of language and identity" (2004: 369). They argue that the "variety of culturally-specific subject positions that speakers enact through language," humanity's "most flexible and pervasive" symbolic resource (369), makes identity a topic "meriting study in its own right." (369) Indeed, much contemporary scholarship on identity also emphasizes that it is a process that gains social meaning in interaction (e.g. De Fina 1997, 264), but until recently identity had relatively murky theoretical underpinnings and was still discussed in a variety of ways.

Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall (2005) propose a framework for the analysis of identity in interaction. They explicate the ontological status of identity as well as describe the mechanisms by which they are constituted. They do this by positing five basic principles of identity as produced in linguistic interaction. The first principle, that of "emergence" (587), draws from approaches in linguistic anthropology that began to look at the ways in which structure emerged in the minutiae of interactions. Bucholtz and Hall

thus maintain that, like culture and performance, identity "emerges within the specific conditions of linguistic interaction" and "is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon." (588)

The second principle, that of "positionality," (591) emphasizes that "identities encompass (a) macro-level demographic categories; (b) local, ethnographically specific cultural positions; and (c) temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles. Their overall point with "positionality" is that different kinds of positionality beyond gender, age, class, ethnicity, etc. "occur simultaneously in a single interaction" (593) and include categories that may be limited to only the interaction itself.

The third principle, "indexicality" (593), concerns "the mechanism whereby identity is constituted" (593). They discuss the concept of indexicality as "the creation of semiotic links between linguistic forms and social meaings" (594). They also explain the various indexical processes in which identity relations emerge in interaction, including: "(a) overt mention of identity categories and labels; (b) implicatures and presuppositions regarding one's own or others' identity position; (c) displayed evaluative and epistemic orientations to ongoing talk, as well as interactional footings and participant roles; and (d) the use of linguistic structures and systems that are ideologically associated with specific personas and groups" (594).

The fourth principle, "relationality" (598), describes the different types of complementary relations through which identity is constructed: "similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice, and authority/deligitimacy" (598). The fifth principle, "partialness"

(605), "helps to resolve a central and longstanding issue regarding research on identity: the extent to which it is understood as relying on agency" (606). Bucholtz and Hall argue that "any given construction of identity may be in part deliberate and intentional, in part habitual and hence often less than fully conscious, in part an outcome of interactional negotiation and contestation, in part an outcome of others' perceptions and representations, and in part an effect of larger ideological processes and material structures that may become relevant to interaction" (606). It is therefore with this perspective and this comprehensive framework for the analysis of identities in interaction in mind that I approach the data.

Elderly migrants, language and identity

Although a strong tradition of gerontological anthropology and ethnographic studies of aging and the elderly exists, there are relatively fewer comprehensive ethnographic accounts of elderly, multilingual refugees in migration. This is at least partly due to the fact that elderly people migrate as refugees far less often than do other age groups.[2] Studies that do take up the issue of elderly people in migration typically come from sociology and focus on cognitive functioning (e.g. Hill, et al), the "healthy immigrant effect" (e.g. Choi), narratives of health situations (e.g. Emami, Benner, Ekman), and elderly immigrants in public institutional care (e.g. Emami et al; Næss and Vabø, 2014).

[2] According to the UNHCR Global Trends 2012 report (UNHCR citation), people over 60 years of age have made up only around 5% of the global refugee population consistently since at least 2003.

The scholarly fascination with youth noted above extends beyond Iranian Studies into the domain of language and identity, and thus studies of youth identity as a product of language continue to constitute a great deal of language and identity research (Bucholtz 2002, "Youth and cultural practice"). A recent special issue of the journal *Pragmatics* looks at "the linguistic production of youth identities under conditions of cultural mobility," and the interest carries over into cross-cultural studies as well. A special issue of the *Journal of Sociolinguistics* (16 number 2) features studies of the "sociolinguistics of globalization in the process of transnationalism," drawing mostly from South Korea, and the issue includes studies of middle-class Korean university students in Toronto (Shin 2012) and Singapore (Kang 2012), graduate students and their families in the US (Song 2012), and temporary migrant workers in rural Korea (Jeon 2012). Therefore, I hope this project can contribute to language and identity research by highlighting a relatively underrepresented population and further incorporating the analytical categories of aging, ethnicity, and migration.

On Iran and Iranians

As I alluded to earlier, an explicit commitment to contribute to a fuller, more accurate portrayal of the Iranian people and their diversity of identities and experiences underlies this project. I therefore identify dominant trends in both social science and popular literature against which some scholars of Iran are beginning to push back and position my project as a response to this overemphasis on certain themes and socioeconomic and age groups.

An effective erasure of Iran's religious minorities occurs in both western mainstream media accounts and topical social sciences literature on contemporary Iran and Iranians, which contain far too few accounts of Iran's religious and ethnic minorities (see Bayat, 2005; Amanolahi, 2005) except to remind us occasionally of their precarious position vis-à-vis the ruling Shi'i theocracy.[3] This treatment risks reducing them to caricatures of victimization and political plot devices.

Perhaps as part of a well-intentioned effort by the mainstream left in the West to respond to media portrayals of Iran as a country of flag-burning America-haters throughout the 1980s, a broad attempt to demonstrate how friendly to the West and "modern" young Iranians in particular are has since been underway. Popular travel accounts by Western backpackers feature titillating titles like *Iranian Rappers and Persian Porn* (Maslin, 2009) and *Drinking Arak off an Ayatollah's Beard* (Jubber, 2010), and the Iranian teenager jamming Pink Floyd in his poster-laden bedroom is practically a stock character in US and UK national daily newspaper articles about Iran. A heavy focus on the upper-middle and upper classes in Iran also characterizes much of this recent literature: No fewer than three books published since 2005 (Kaveh Basmenji's *Tehran Blues: Youth Culture in Iran*, Nicholas Jubber's *Drinking Arak off an Ayatollah's Beard*, and Armin Arefi's *Green Ribbons and Turbans*) all begin their narratives in an upscale north Tehran neighborhood. This popular interest in Iran's youth, with its emphasis on drawing parallels between their consumption habits and social lives and those of young

[3] e.g. Nader and Stewart, 2013; Aghajanian, 2014; Bandow, 2013.

people in the West, has indeed become narrow and essentializing in simply a different way.

The interest in wealthy young Iranians carries over to scholarly efforts as well. Three relatively recent ethnographic accounts of youth in Tehran, Pardis Mahdavi's *Passionate Uprisings* (2009), Roxanne Varzi's *Warring Souls* (2006), and Shahram Khosravi's *Young and Defiant in Tehran* (2008) deal primarily with Iran's youth rebelling against the state in various ways. Some scholars of Iran are looking critically at these prevailing trends and calling for expanded theoretical engagement and increased attention to innovative methodologies and underemphasized perspectives within the Iranian population. In a forthcoming article, Blake Atwood (forthcoming, 2015) comments on the limiting tendency of these recent ethnographic studies of Iranian youth to portray the lives of young Iranians as universally defined by struggle. He also foregrounds the prominent yet heretofore underemphasized role of digital communication technology in the lives of Iranian youth and ultimately makes a persuasive case for a "textual turn" that requires scholars studying Iran's youth to incorporate a wider range of texts and visual evidence into their analyses. Zuzanna Olszewska (2013) also challenges the ethnographic trend of theoretical frameworks based entirely on acts of "resistance" to a universally oppressive state and demonstrates the inherent deficiencies of an approach that privileges a specific socioeconomic class in attempting to portray young Iranians fairly and justly.

To be sure, a robust interest in Iranian youth and youth culture constitutes a justifiably significant part of scholarly and popular literature on contemporary Iran, and I

draw attention to these valuable critiques because I share with them and others working in Iranian Studies a commitment to looking inwardly and critically at the methodological, analytical, theoretical, and thematic foci of this literature as an interdisciplinary effort to study Iran, Iranians, and Iranian culture as justly and fairly as possible. However, the introduction of other age, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups to this body of literature is increasingly necessary, and I therefore also position my work as a response to the severe lack of attention to Iran's elderly and ethnoreligious minorities on behalf of both scholarly and popular/mainstream media literature.

Chapter Two

Introduction

This chapter deals mainly with the study's participants, the background of this project, and the specific methods I have used. To provide a sense of the research setting and context in which I carried out this study, I give a brief historical review of the Armenians in Iran and a description of the process by which members of this group enter the US as refugees, both of which are necessary for making sense of the themes and discourses from which participants draw and the larger setting in which our talk occurs. I next describe in brief the type of institutional, cross-cultural encounters that inspired this study's main data-gathering format, why I believe they can be examined as sites for identities in interaction, and how they can lend insight into how discursive construction of identity on various levels impact resettlement for Armenian Iranians in the US. I then introduce the people who participated in this study, discussing how we came to meet and work with each other, after which I paint a general picture of how the conversations proceeded. Finally, I set the stage for the analysis of my data.

Armenians in Iran

Historic Armenia's proximity to the Iranian plateau and various military entanglements involving regional and independent governors of Armenia and various Persian empires going at least as far back as the Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BCE) imply a long history of cultural exchange between the peoples living in modern day Armenia and modern day Iran. In fact, in discussing the Armenians in the time of the Safavid Empire, George Bournoutian observes that "Armenians were sufficiently

important to be included among the major provinces or *satrapies* and peoples listed on the Behistun rock, erected by Darius I in 520/519 BC to commemorate his achievements and conquests. This is the first time that the names *Armenia* and *Armenian* (inscribed as *Armina* and *Arminiya*) appear in recorded history" (Bournoutian, 1995: 27).

Many of the Armenian Iranians who came to Glendale as refugees are the descendants of the some 400,000 Armenians forcibly removed from the town of Julfa (in modern day Azerbaijan) in 1603 by the Safavid shah Abbas I (r. 1587-1629). Facing a strong Ottoman counter-offensive and hoping to deny the advancing enemy supplies and quarters, the shah had all of Julfa's residents deported to Iran and the town burned to the ground (Ghougassian). Those Armenians who had influential positions in the church or had otherwise been involved in the lucrative Levantine silk trade were chosen to inhabit a special settlement on the outskirts of Esfahan where they were to remain unperturbed. The life and times of these "New Julfa" Armenians, who weathered various ups and downs as power occasionally changed hands but generally prospered both economically and politically, have been documented extensively.

Much more difficult to find, however, is information on the Armenians who were not part of this commercial and religious elite or landed nobility but instead found themselves scattered in various villages throughout central Iran that they built themselves. Some were as far from Esfahan, the hub of Armenian activity in Iran until the twentieth century, as 110 miles. Others settled relatively closer to the historic Armenian homelands, in modern-day Iranian Azerbaijan and Mazandaran. In the early twentieth century, over half of New Julfa's population left for promising economic

opportunities in India, Khuzestan, or the Qajar capital of Tehran, and a "gradual influx of Armenian villagers from the rural districts of P'eria, Čār Mahāl, and Burvari" (Ghougassian) more or less made up for the demographic loss. In a series of informal pilot life history interviews I conducted about a year and a half before conceiving this project, I discovered that many of the elderly Armenian Iranian refugees in Glendale were among the last to be born and raised in these villages. They had moved to the large urban areas of Tehran and Esfahan, either alone for jobs or with their families, in their teenage or young adult years.

Eliz Sanasarian writes that by the twentieth century,

> "…there were significant Armenian communities in northwestern Iran and the capital, Tehran. Although Armenians in Persia excelled as small artisans, were involved in international trade, and were basically integrated into the modern Iranian economy, they never dominated the economic sphere of the country. Similarly, their political role remained limited. During Qajar rule, however, Armenian ambassadors were sent to Europe and Armenians played an active role in the liberal, left, and constitutional movements in Iran in the early 20th century." (2004: 38)

Armenians in fact played a prominent role in the formation of Iranian national identity (Berberian 2005: 279). They participated in both the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1907 (Berberian 1996; 2005) and an armed movement against foreign aggressors in the northern forests of Iran during World War I (Arkun 1997). However, Armenians chafed under the modernizing and pan-Iranist policies of Reza Shah, the first Pahlavi monarch (1925-1941), who shut down Armenian schools in 1938-39 and permitted an

atmosphere in which Armenians and Iran's other religious minorities were denied government jobs and attacked in state media (Sansarian 2004: 38).

Under Mohammad Reza Shah (1941-1979), Armenians for the most part regained their internal autonomy. Providing they did not harbor political aspirations, Iran's minorities (with the exception of Baha'is) benefited from a "general policy of economic development, modernization, and Westernization" (Sanasarian 2004: 39) under Mohammad Reza Shah. Armenians served in lower-ranking positions in the military, excelled in trade and commerce, and made significant cultural contributions to Iranian society, notably in "photography, theater, and the film industry" (Amurian and Kasheff). The Armenians I spoke with in Glendale often contrasted the Mohammad Reza Shah era with the Islamic Republic and argued for the former as a kind of "golden age" for Armenians.

The Islamic revolution in 1979, which officially made Iran a Shi'i Islamic state under the direct rule of the Islamic clergy, kicked off the first major phase of migration out of Iran, and many who migrated out were among Iran's religious minority communities (Hakimzadeh 2006). Armenian Iranians left Iran in such numbers during the period immediately following the revolution and during the Iran-Iraq War from 1980-88 that their numbers dwindled from around 200,000 in the mid-1980s to a little over 150,000 by 1995 (Sanasarian 1995: 243). From 1981 to 1984, the Armenian community semi-successfully fought the Islamic Republic government for its right to teach Armenian language in Armenian schools, winning the right to do so for only two hours a week (1995: 247-252). Armenians have also been able to maintain their own social clubs

and community centers, but to the effect that Armenian life in general has become relatively more insulated from the rest of society (1995: 252-253). In summarizing the relationship of the Islamic Republic to the Armenian Iranian community, Sanasarian writes,

> "The relationship of the Islamic Republican regime to the diasporan Armenian community of Iran has been shaped by personalistic intrusions and a decentralized system of governance. The prohibitions and strictness of the early years gave way to flexibility and compromise...many Armenians *prefer* the close-knit, isolationist, and nonassimilationist setting provided by this regime" (1995: 260-261).

Nonetheless, as Gheytanchi argues persuasively, Armenians in Iran today exist as an "eternal Other" in Iranian society (2007: 174), excluded from mainstream representation and participation by over a century of nation-building projects allowing room for only one kind of Iranian national identity and a literary legacy trading in stereotypes of Armenians as "winemakers, café owners, and pork eaters" (2007: 174). Armenians in Iran are distinguished by their discernible accents when speaking Persian as well as their recognizable names and surnames, some of which even contain words like *Eisa* ("Jesus") and *Masihi* ("Christian"). One of the participants in this study told me that a common way for Muslims among his generation to address Armenian men and women is *museo* (as in the French *monsieur*) and *mādām*, a practice he had always felt was tantamount to saying, "You're not one of us." It is thus with this complex history and web of social, political, and religious relations that Armenians leave their homeland and enter the US as refugees.

Coming to the US as refugees

Popular ideas in the US about refugees as universally poor, downtrodden people fleeing humanitarian disasters with only the clothes on their back (Khosravi 2010) and media stereotypes about Iranian Americans as universally wealthy and residing in West LA might lead some to think of the two categories as mutually exclusive. In fact, between 1980 and 2004, just over a quarter of all of the Iranian migrants to the United States came as refugees or asylum seekers (Hakimzadeh and Dixon, 2006), and those numbers have held into the 2010s: between 2005 and 2012, over 28,000 Iranians came to the US as refugees, the majority settling in Southern California (Office of Refugee Resettlement).

A brief review of US refugee policy

The Department of State, which is responsible for managing refugee resettlement and overseeing the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, conducts overseas refugee processing using a system of three admission categories. Priority 1 includes "persons referred to the US refugee program by UNHCR offices, a US embassy, or a designated NGO." Priority 2 does not require a UN referral and covers "groups of special humanitarian concern to the United States." Priority 3 is family reunification cases based on an affidavit of relationship, although the US stopped accepting Priority 3 applications altogether in 2008. Despite the language of "priorities" and the numerical order of the categories, there is no particular urgency in processing those classified as "Priority 1," as refugees who have passed through the UNHCR but have been held up by USCIS or DHS will tell anyone who asks (Bruno 2014).

Refugees attempting to resettle in the US under the Priority 1 designation have to prove "persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group," (USCIS Online) a tricky process in which applicants are often presumed to be exaggerating or lying, and immigration officers go out of their way to tease out lies and holes in refugees' stories, even where there may be none at all. A special provision of the 1990 Foreign Operations Appropriations Act known as the "Lautenberg Amendment" reduced the evidentiary standard for certain Soviet and Indochinese nationals and facilitated their resettlement in the US and their adjustment to permanent resident status. In 2003, this amendment was expanded to include Iran's major religious minority groups: Armenians, Assyrians, Baha'is, Jews, Mandaeans, and Zoroastrians (Bruno 2014).[4]

The path to refugee status for Iranian religious minorities

In order to apply for the US refugee program as a member of an Iranian religious minority, a person must first have someone in the US willing to refer to a nonprofit resettlement agency and provide its staff with exhaustive information about the applicant and his or her extended family. The US-based relative (an "anchor" in resettlement agency parlance) must also submit copies of the applicant's national ID card, *shenāsnāmeh* (an Iranian document issued at birth in which one records significant life events such as marriage, the birth of children, and participation in elections), and documents proving both the religion of the applicant and the applicant's parents,

[4] Noticeably absent from this list is Sunni Muslims, even though repression of Iranian Sunnis is well-documented (see…) and Sunnis outnumber all other Iranian religious minority groups combined.

including marriage documents and various church-issued ID cards or baptism certificates. Finally, since the refugees must remain in Vienna for processing and interviewing by the US government, the anchors must send HIAS a deposit of $3,000 per person on behalf of the applicants, lest an expensive visit to the hospital by a refugee become a burden for the Austrian government.

The resettlement agencies in the US then forward the applications to an Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) in Vienna for review. The OPE in Vienna, while technically the property of the State Department, are managed and staffed by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), a nonprofit organization which has won and re-won contracts from the State Department to manage the OPE over the years. After reviewing the applications, the OPE staff set an intake interview date and inform the applicants in Iran of this date via telephone.

It is from here on out that the process can become quite arduous. After receiving confirmation of the intake date from the OPE in Vienna, the applicants in Iran have a short period of time – sometimes as short as two or three weeks – to gather up their belongings, sell property or valuables, say goodbye to family and friends, and move their entire lives to Vienna, where they spend an average of four to six months in processing.

In Vienna, the applicants have no work authorization and are responsible for securing their own housing and medical insurance for this entire period. The aforementioned $3,000 deposit has also usually been drawn from personal savings (or borrowed in more desperate situations), making matters more difficult. While in Vienna, the applicants attend cultural orientation classes, go to interviews and health exams, fill

out forms, do plenty of walking around, and undergo background checks by various US governmental agencies before finally being granted refugee status. At this point, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) provides them with an interest-free loan which pays for their flight to the US and informs the resettlement agencies in the US of their flight information. The resettlement agencies contact the anchors, who meet their family members at the airport.

It is at this point that the new refugees face a deluge of American agencies, organizations, advertisements, credit card offers, and utility companies, manifesting itself in the form of almost daily masses of indecipherable letters, oversized envelopes, and unintelligible phone calls and messages. The caseworkers at the resettlement agency that initiated the original application are primarily responsible for ensuring that newly-arrived refugees are given the tools and information necessary to survive and thrive in the US. Other duties include assisting with registration in social services, English classes, and schools, doing regular follow-ups via telephone or during an office visit, and visiting the refugees in their homes, both within 24 hours of arrival to the US and before 30 days after arrival. Should the family move before 90 days of residency, a home visit must be conducted at the new home as well.

For almost three years, from early 2010 to the end of 2012, I was a caseworker at one of these resettlement agencies. My main task was to facilitate the transition to life in the US for refugees by providing a variety of services, including providing various orientations, meeting with people in their homes, assisting with finding places to live and enrolling children in school and parents in English classes, and helping

people understand the job landscape. On a typical day, I visited at least one but often two families who had arrived between five and ninety days before in their homes or in the homes of their family members, or "anchors" in refugee resettlement jargon.

The conditions of my job required that I extend myself beyond my comfort zone. Every day I visited people and interacted with them in their homes, answered dozens of phone calls, and responded to crises or sensitive situations. To complicate matters further, the most commonly spoken language in the office was Persian, a language in which I had had three semesters of college-level instruction and roughly a year of self-study, but I had had no time in Iran and certainly no exposure to the language in an institutional context. Since my coworkers, my immediate supervisor, and nearly all of my refugee clients spoke it as a first or second language and were often beginner or intermediate English learners, nearly all of my "speaking" work (as opposed to writing case notes or e-mails) was done in Persian.

As is surely not difficult to imagine, this led to innumerable linguistic and cultural missteps, ranging from relatively minor (using a familiar second-person pronoun a bit too early on in the relationship) to quite dire (mistranslating flight times, being unable to understand someone in the middle of a tearful breakdown). Fortunately, I found the Iranians with whom I interacted on the whole very generous, forgiving, and receptive to the fact that not only was I learning the language but, after a time, using it more or less properly in an institutional context.

Although being the only non-Armenian case worker in the office meant that I received a more diverse case load that included Zoroastrians, Assyrians, and Baha'is, the

majority of my case load was still made up of Armenian Iranians, and I interacted most with this community during my three years as a case worker. I lived in south Glendale and within walking distance from various businesses, all Armenian Iranian-owned, which I frequently patronized. My immediate supervisor, the coworkers with whom I spent the most time and discussed work the most, nearly all of my refugee clients, and even, after a while, the only friends I had in Los Angeles, were Persian-speaking Armenians, a situation which vastly improved my language use but ultimately left me with more questions than answers.

The home visit

The "home visit" is a refugee's first contact with US institutions (after going through customs, of course), and often the first sustained contact with a US citizen. The home visit as designed by the refugee resettlement agencies is supposed to be a chance for caseworkers to view the refugees' living situation and make sure there are no safety hazards and that refugees know the rules, regulations, and laws associated with renting their home and living in the area. It is also a chance for refugees to ask the case worker questions about whatever has posed a challenge for them.

The refugee home visit resembles the kind of sociolinguistic interviews examined by Schiffrin (1993) in its tendency to encourage open participation and shifts away from and back toward a broad interactional agenda. This dynamic inspired me to gather data in a similar spirit: In both the institutional "home visit" and the research "home visit" I have done to gather data, an interview does occur, but the point is that the interview is only one aspect of the interaction and it is by no means structured, one-sided, or predictable.

The interaction proves to be a rich site of spontaneous and mutual cross-cultural exploration, identity work, and metapragmatic discourse, even extending beyond talk and into the overlapping realms of gesture, culturally-specific politeness practices, performance, scenery, and even spatial arrangement of people and objects. I have attempted to widen my analytical lens to include all of these aspects of the home visits as I unpack the interactions that occur therein.

The home visit in the institutional context

As with perhaps most cross-cultural encounters that occur in an institutional context and in a country which is completely new for some of those involved, the home visit as an encounter is a decidedly asymmetrical one. That is, caseworkers know much more than do refugees about just what kind of interaction is imminent and how things are supposed to proceed. Resettlement guidelines determined by the government entities that fund and regulate the resettlement agencies work in tandem with what I would commonly refer to as the "compliance fetishism" of resettlement agency administrators themselves to ensure that home visits are also cold, impersonal affairs, insisting on a bare minimum of emotional investment (although preferably none at all). Caseworkers are also encouraged to maintain distance between themselves and refugees and are reminded not to accept, for example, offers of tea and sweets, even though this may be an crucial aspect of a family's hospitality and politeness practices and denying such an offer might be considered awkward at best and offensive at worst.

Refugees, on the other hand, often find themselves lost in a sea of acronyms and terminology, confused throughout the process about just who works for which

organization and what each organization's role is. Exacerbating this confusion is the State Department requirement that caseworkers visit refugees in their homes within 24 hours of arrival to the US, a visit which happens even before the refugees know who their caseworker is or from exactly which organization he or she is coming. Therefore, they often rely on their relatives (who may be only slightly more informed about the US side of the process) to tell them this information and, crucially, to prepare them in the event that the caseworker is actually a government officer or anyone otherwise in a position to make life difficult if something is not "up to code." While the visit is not exactly like the "gatekeeper encounters" investigated by Holmes (2007), Kerekes (2007), and Baptiste and Seig (2007), the prospect of the encounter can still be unsettling, and caseworkers are sometimes assumed to have a direct connection to government, even after they explicitly and repeatedly insist otherwise.

Home visits as sites of reciprocal engagement and cross-cultural exploration

Caseworkers inevitably find themselves in the know about refugees' health, families, work histories, and the day-to-day struggles of resettlement in the US, and refugees often find that, for better or for worse, they have the caseworker to rely on when relatives and friends are unavailable. The relationship thus often progresses to a level of emotional involvement that goes beyond the formal, impersonal relationship idealized and enshrined in institutional guidelines and compliance standards and begins to more closely resemble a friendship, even considering the varying expectations of comportment and commitment regarding friendship that various cultures might harbor. As an example, people would often ask me what my favorite Iranian foods were and then make me set a

day to come over and eat that very food in their home. This situation is comparable to many ethnographers in the field who find themselves confronted with new choices and tensions when they form relationships with informants (see, e.g., Lawless, 1992) and is the primary outcome of the home visits, which put caseworkers and refugees together in the latter's home, a private, personal place, seemingly a world away from the flimsy cubicle walls of the cold grey office.

Naturally, many factors contribute to whether or not relationships move from a formal relationship to something involving more mutual sharing. Traditionally the resettlement agencies who work with Persian speakers have favored Persian- or Armenian-speakers from Iran as caseworkers and thus try to keep at least one such person on staff when possible, the obvious benefit being the possibility of direct communication between casework staff and refugees, although this scenario too can have its own challenges, the most oft-cited one in resettlement agency discourse being the expectation that a fellow (Armenian/Iranian) caseworker will give special treatment or, conversely, find himself or herself in an awkward web of obligations to a refugee compatriot. On the other hand, while a non-Iranian caseworker with no knowledge of Persian or Armenian language can present obvious communication challenges, this arrangement also potentially sidesteps some of the issues an Armenian or Iranian caseworker might encounter.

I am white and I was born and raised in the US, facts which most refugees seemed to guess correctly with one look at me, and yet, to their surprise, I speak Persian. This nearly always led to an initial bit of confusion when meeting new people, and the next

few minutes of conversation were inevitably oriented toward discovering the extent of my language skills, whether I really had an Iranian mother or father, whether my interlocutors needed to modify their speech for us to understand each other, what idioms or colloquialisms I might understand, and my familiarity with culture and customs.

Being a non-Iranian speaker of Persian on the job provided me with a significant advantage both in the job and in soliciting participants for this study, namely in that establishing rapport and relationships was easy thanks to the overwhelmingly generous, positive, and supportive reaction of Iranians to my efforts to learn and speak Persian. This most frequently played out at home visits in lengthy, exploratory conversations, which centered around a variety of seemingly ready-made questions raised by the peculiarity of a white, US citizen Persian speaker: "Why did you learn?" "Was it because of a girl?" "Was it difficult?" "Have you been to Iran?" "Do you want to go?" "Do you like Iranian food/books/art/movies/music/history?"

Based on any one out of my repertoire of carefully rehearsed stock answers to these questions, interesting conversations nearly always developed, and I exploited this pattern often as a means not only to learning and sharing, but also to forming lasting and meaningful relationships. I also must admit that I jumped at the opportunity to improve my language. The conversations nearly always led to a back-and-forth exchange regarding sociocultural differences and similarities, and my obvious interest in Persian language and Iranian culture appeared to endear me to many people and prompted them to share with me their narratives and stories about growing up and living in Iran and leaving to come to the US. I frequently made friends with refugees, especially those who

lived near me, and it was not uncommon for me to visit them outside of working hours for tea or even lunch or dinner. Additionally, my "outsider" status may in fact have made people feel more at ease in sharing details of their personal lives with me (see Lawless, 1992).

The "home visit" as a method in this study

The idea to interview people at all came to me somewhat randomly. At work I would often speak to an older Iranian man who attended the resettlement agency's weekly citizenship classes. He and I had a number of interesting conversations during those few minutes before and after his classes, and he frequently alluded to events in his life in a way that made me want to know more. One day while we were speaking, the idea to visit him at his home and listen to or even record his stories in full popped into my head, and when I asked him, he obliged. The experience turned out to be a very pleasant one, but I was disappointed when I noticed while listening to the tape later on that even though the man's wife had been home as well, she had said almost nothing.

When a helpful coworker heard that I was interviewing someone and suggested that I interview her father-in-law too, I planned to do so in a better way that would bring his wife into the discussion if she were home. My efforts failed not only that time, but a third time as well, with another coworker's parents. These failures caused me to reevaluate the interview as a methodology and forced me to consider for this project what I could do in the interview situation to elicit more participation from women in a way that would not be impolite or make people feel awkward. As I will show, I was only partially successful, but one of the major goals of this project is to interrogate the effectiveness of

this method and understand the impact of my own subject position and ideological commitments.

It is mainly the open, reflective, reciprocal talk about culture, customs, language, experiences, beliefs, and desires, as well as the foundational identity work that constitutes all of the above, in which I am interested here and which I have therefore tried to recreate with the life history interview-home visits. In soliciting study participants, all of whom I had met before in the institutional context, I have recalled and emphasized this atmosphere of open talk and mutual sharing. Throughout this project I have also volunteered and worked part time at my old office, where I met some participants, and I spoke to others I knew when I was still a caseworker and with whom I felt I had good conversations, telling them that I am interested in gathering life stories. I have also expressed my interest in the contours of the cross-cultural interaction situation and the sociocultural dimensions of visiting an Armenian Iranian home. I have interviewed four couples for this pilot study, whom I introduce below.

One question I confronted early on was how to get conversations going at all, since we would not have refugee resettlement matters as a pretext for meeting or speaking in the first place. Jennifer Clary-Lemon (2010) applies a synthesis of sociolinguistic methods and what she refers to as "a simplified discourse historical approach" (2010: 10) to a body of oral history interviews with Irish immigrants in Canada. She distinguishes her oral history interview method from the approaches of critical discourse analysts that used "direct and explicit question sets about national identity, consciousness about national identity…construction of a common political past,

the role of language, and current political problems" (2010: 12) and says that her oral history interview questions "were framed to elicit content about coming to Winnipeg (one's family background and story), and memories and stories of participants' involvement in forming the Irish Association" (2010:12). My approach to these interviews basically mirrors Clary-Lemon's approach: I have started out asking people about their childhoods, their places of birth, their parents, their families, and I have found that I have had to ask very few follow-up questions.

Researchers have raised valid questions about whether to interview couples separately or jointly, and this was an issue for me particularly during the design phase of the project. Taylor and de Vocht (2011) posit a number of advantages for joint interviews, especially for researchers interested in an interpretive phenomenological approach, who see humans as living in a continuous process of interaction and collaborative meaning-making with the other entities they encounter in the world. They also argue that interviewing couples separately does not even fully erase the presence of the other, should this be the researcher's goal (2011: 1580). Other advantages include a phenomenon they refer to as "unconcealment," whereby a spouse can "prompt the other about something he or she has forgotten, or by giving additional information that encourages more information to be revealed" (2011: 1582). They also identify a disadvantage of separate interviews particularly relevant to this study, namely that they can "potentially generate anxiety within couples because this approach might imply that secrets exist" (1582).

I have thus opted to interview couples at the same time, going back and forth between spouses to gather basic biographical information before asking each to elaborate on his or her childhood and upbringing, gradually working toward the point at which the spouses' lives converge. I believe that while this presents the challenge of with whom to start the interview, it is ultimately much more conducive to the kind of spontaneous, open-ended discussions I have described. I have audio-recorded the interactions from the moment the door opens and have begun the interactions by eliciting life history narratives and then simply letting participants take the conversation down paths of their choosing. I have transcribed the conversations, roughly 10 hours of audio, and they have formed my main body of data here.

The participants

One of the benefits of a very small sample size is the chance to introduce and say a bit about each couple with whom I spoke before moving on to the analysis. Even though some participants expressed that they didn't mind the use of their real names, I have opted to use pseudonyms for everyone.

Alen and Ani

I met Alen and Ani while I was still a case worker; in fact, I *was* their case worker. I was able to reconnect with them through their daughters, who used to volunteer at the office and with whom I still maintain contact. I conducted the first interview with Alen and Ani, and the experience was a good example of the occasionally unpredictable nature of ethnographic fieldwork: I had proposed coming at around 2:00 PM so that the family could eat lunch first, but Ani insisted that I come for lunch. When I offered that

the lunch might interfere with the interview, Ani said, "You can't come to our house and not have a meal. It's just not right." Therefore, we shared lunch while doing the interview, and I have had to consider how this might have impacted the talk and interactional moves that occurred.

Alen grew up in Tehran, did his military service at 18, and went straight to work thereafter at his father's confectionery business. Ani grew up in the Persian Gulf city of Abadan, at the time an outpost of British oil companies, and indeed her father worked as an accountant in one of these companies. Ani had worked as a typist until the birth of their first daughter, after which she left her job to raise the children. They have lived in the Glendale area for about two years.

Seroj and Marta

I also met Seroj and Marta as a case worker (hauling away a couch they were donating to another refugee family) but reconnected with them when I saw them attending a citizenship class at the agency. They also came around two years ago and, although their parents grew up in rural Iranian villages, they both grew up in Tehran. Seroj worked at a prominent construction company as a draftsman before the Revolution of 1978-79 and as a private contractor thereafter, and Marta worked as a nurse throughout the Iran-Iraq War.

Khachik and Maryam

Of all the participants, I was the closest to Khachik and Maryam, and this is reflected in our interaction. I worked with Khachik and Maryam's daughter and was their caseworker when they came to the US in 2011 with their other daughter. In contrast to

most of the other participants, Khachik and Maryam both grew up in rural villages just a few miles from each other, and both moved to Tehran with family in their preteen years. Maryam worked at home, and Khachik did military service in northern Iran at 18 and then began work primarily as a mechanic, but he performed other types of work as it was available.

Hayk and Loosik

I knew the least about Hayk and Loosik before the interview and had in fact only met them once, but their overwhelmingly positive response to my offhanded comment about my research prompted me to get in touch with them and ask them to participate. Hayk was born and spent several years in the village of Aligoodarz in Lorestan Province, and Loosik was born and raised in Tehran.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced the context in which the research took place, emphasizing that the event under analysis here is a life history interview that closely resembles an institutional, cross-cultural encounter that occurs at the beginning of Armenian Iranian refugees' resettlement in the US. In the following two chapters I offer my analysis of how Armenian Iranian refugees use language to discursively construct identities in these home visits.

Chapter Three

Introduction

In constructing identity through dialogue during a home visit with a US citizen caseworker/researcher, Armenian Iranians face a central tension: The path by which they have come to the US is based on the assumption that Armenians face discrimination and persecution, but some non-Armenian Iranians in the US, who have had to take more strenuous paths to resettlement, debate the actual extent of this discrimination. Armenian Iranians thus sometimes feel they must prove this discrimination and persecution by pointing to history or their own anecdotal evidence. At the same time, they want to demonstrate that they too identify as Iranian in a new majority culture that might expect them to do otherwise because of this legacy of discrimination and persecution. How then to represent a legacy of marginalization at the hands of the Islamic Republic of Iran – a government with a negative image in the West in general - while still identifying with Iranian society and culture? This chapter explores how Armenian Iranians use the home visit as an opportunity to resolve this tension.

The spouses in these interviews articulate the various themes and discourses collaboratively, doing so primarily via explicit, evaluative comments and anecdotes which are made relevant to the identities being constructed here by certain features of discourse (Flannery 2008: 127-128). Furthermore, they most often typify the kinds of identity relations that Bucholtz and Hall describe as “adequation” and “distinction” (2005: 599-600) in that they rest on foundations of sameness and difference.

Throughout the interviews, participants also take frequent turns to offer personal anecdotes. These anecdotes typically function as what Schiffrin refers to as "illustrative" narratives in that they "elaborate and evaluate a particular instance of a more general experience" (Schiffrin 2002: 318), namely some aspect of being Armenian in Iran, in the US, or somewhere in between. These illustrative narratives can also be read as a "form of argumentation, allowing narrators to express opinions and beliefs indirectly, through the mediation of characters." (De Fina and King, 2011) Here I adopt an approach similar to Clary-Lemon and others who have analyzed the discourse of oral history narratives or narratives of personal experience (see in particular Flannery, 2008) to examine some of the ways in which the participants construct ethnic identity by positioning themselves and others through explicit comments about ideas and beliefs and through characters in story worlds.

I will first demonstrate how participants' established a topical foundation for the discussions as an explication of Armenian Iranian identity with their opening statements and their insertion of Armenian Iranian history into their own narratives. I will then provide examples of a particular framing of Armenian Iranian history that begins in Esfahan and takes a different view of the forced migration of Armenians into Iran by Shah Abbas. Following this, I describe some of the ways in which Armenian Iranians in the home visit identify selectively with certain aspects of a national Iranian identity. Finally, I demonstrate how these speakers carve a place for themselves in contemporary Iranian society by emphasizing their solidarity with ordinary Iranians under the repressive rule of a theocratic regime.

Framing the discussion as about Armenians

The home visit itself occasions a discussion about Armenian Iranian identity. The premise of this chapter partly rests on whether or not the participants' talk is a spontaneous, reflective act of self-presentation and not one elicited with straightforward interview questions; one might otherwise be forgiven for thinking that participants were simply saying what they thought I wanted to hear. In Clary-Lemon's method, in which she also asked open-ended questions, she found that

> rather than answering explicit questions about national identity, participants instead wove in tenets of national and immigrant identity in the stories that they told in answering questions about cultural group membership – that is to say, participants constructed narratives of immigrant Irish identity while discussing their own group membership in a cultural 'club' (2010:12).

Similarly, the opportunity to sit down and discuss at length one's experiences growing up in Iran and migrating to the United States forces much of what people normally take for granted about identity to the forefront of one's mind and the conversation at hand. Being steeped in a new majority culture's norms that might seem unfamiliar or incomprehensible can also force people to evaluate their own ideas and beliefs as well as those of the majority culture, especially when one's interlocutor is a member of that majority culture.

I alluded earlier to the fact that, although I solicited people for what I referred to in Persian as "life stories" (*dâstânha-ye zendegī*), participants often couched their personal narratives in terms of the broader historical and cultural narratives of Iranian and/or Armenian history and the Armenian (-Iranian) community. This suggests that even though I did not come into the interviews with the explicit goal of uncovering something

about Armenian Iranian identity as a macro-level identity category, the participants broadly assumed this to be my main goal in the interaction and thus set out to provide me with a comprehensive understanding of the community as they understand it. In fact, in some cases these topics commanded so much of the conversation that I had to call participants some days after the interview after I realized that I had forgotten to gather certain basic biographical details.

This was most apparent at the beginning of my interview with Hayk and Loosik, from which I draw my first excerpt:

Excerpt 1

1 A: *ta'rif konin az ūn mohit, che khāterāti az māmān o bābā…*
2 H: '*arz be hozuretun ke bandeh motavalled-e Aligoodarz, Aligoodarz,*
3 *yeki az shahrha-ye Lorestān (.) ke aksaran mardom-e Lor zendegi mikonan(.)Armaniā az*
4 *Esfahān be tadrij kuch kardan yek meghdār pakhsh shodan be tamāme noqāte Irān az*
5 *jomle Aligoodarz ke niākān-e man budan. Midunid mā sābeghe-ye sisad o panjāh sāleh*
6 *dārim dar Iran.*

-

1 A: Describe that environment, what memories (do you have) of your mother and father...
2 H: I humbly state[5] that I was born in Aligoodarz, Aligoodarz, one of the cities of
3 Lorestan (.) in which live mostly Lors (.) the Armenians gradually migrated out from
4 Esfahan and became more or less spread throughout Iran, including Aligoodarz
5 where my ancestors are from. You know, we have a three hundred and fifty year history
6 in Iran.

Rather than respond to my question about the environment in which he grew up or a description of his mother and father, Hayk mentions the Armenian community seemingly at random before bringing this line of thought back to the village in which he was born.

[5] This is not an ideal translation of '*arz be hozūretūn*. However, as it is part of a complex system of Persian honorifics, it is difficult to translate into English. Beeman identifies the infinitive verb '*arz kardan* as the "self-lowering equivalent of 'to say'" (Beeman 1986: 192).

Two of the other interviews I conducted also begin in a strikingly similar way. Not only does Hayk mention the Armenian community, but he follows it up with a pointed statement about the collective history of Armenians on the Iranian plateau. In this and other interviews in which it occurs, this kind of response serves to establish Armenians as an ethnic minority in Iran as a foundational topic of the conversation and something to which participants oriented periodically.

Also notable is the fact that Hayk takes Esfahan as the starting point in his narrative: Armenians have a history that goes back long before the forced migration of the Julfa Armenians by Shah Abbas to Esfahan, but for Hayk, the history of Armenian Iranians begins with this original community of Armenians in Esfahan. He also doesn't mention Shah Abbas or even that the Armenians were forcibly moved to Iran. Years ago, when I first started hearing from Armenian refugees about the history of Armenian Iranians, I expected that Armenians would portray Shah Abbas, who was responsible for forcibly relocating the Armenians to Iran, as a kind of enemy figure for separating Armenians from their homeland. But the way Armenian Iranians discuss Shah Abbas and his scorched earth policy of total forced migration proved to be more nuanced and indicative of where Armenian Iranians see their own place in Iran's sociopolitical history and constellation of diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups.

Shah Abbas: Historical enemy of Armenians?

Khachik and Maryam demonstrate this point in their own stylistic telling of the historical narrative of forced Armenian migration to Esfahan. In this excerpt, Khachik

and Maryam have just concluded a series of comments on the difficulties of village life during their childhoods, and Khachik has just mentioned the migration:

Excerpt 2

K: Un Shāh Abbās be qolesh vāq'an amal mikone.
A: Mmhm.
K: Ke miāre (..) un var-e (.) Zāyande Rud hamaro mide be Arāmane.
A: Mmhm.
K: Bad mām az unjā pakhsh mishim dehāthā (.) unjuri tu dehāt-hā zendegi mikardim. Be in shekl bud.
M: Be hamun Shāh Abbās migan ye jāyi bede faqat rud dāshte bāshe. Rudkhāne dāshte bāshe o zamin. Unja zendegi mikonim. Khodemuno misazim.

-

K: That Shah Abbas really keeps his promise.
A: Mmhm.
K: (That is,) (..) he gives all of one side of the Zayande Rud (River) to the Armenians.
A: Mmhm.
K: Then we spread out from there (into the) villages (.) we lived that way, in the villages. It was like this.
M: They tell (that same) Shah Abbas "just give us a place with a river. (It should have) a river and land. We'll live there. We'll make our own way there."

Not only does this excerpt appear in the middle of a stretch of dialogue that was heretofore unrelated to the larger Armenian community, thereby referring back to this foundational topic of the conversation, but Khachik and Maryam build an even stronger sense of collectivity between themselves as narrators and the Armenians forced to migrate to Iran by Shah Abbas through a variety of stylistic choices as they talk.

First, both use the deictic "we" pronoun and first-person plural verb forms to include themselves as part of a collectivity with the Armenians they describe. When Khachik says "we spread out from there [into the] villages, we lived that way, in the

villages," his use of "we" makes him sound as though he is talking about his own family. Both Khachik and Maryam also use the present tense throughout, making the story more immediate (e.g. Georgakopoulou 1994) and contributing to a "symbolic construction of discursive continuity with a meaningful past" (Briggs and Bauman 1990: 78).

Khachik otherwise tells the story with much the same speed, gestures, and other prosodic features with which he describes events that have occurred in his own life: This is a real and present reality with resonances in the here and now, not a forgotten story in some dusty book. He drives this point home for me near the very end of our interview when, after I use the word normally glossed in Persian as "narrative" (*revāyat*) in thanking them for taking the time to speak with me, he makes it a point to tell me that what he has told me is not a *revāyat*, a Persian word commonly associated with folk tales; it is *haqiqat* ("fact").

Khachik and Maryam also use certain stylistic features in their telling to index evaluative stances toward the characters they are animating and the ideas at hand. In line 1, Khachik says that Shah Abbas "really" (*vâq'an*) kept his promise to the Armenians, presumably to take care of them. *Vâq'an* can be glossed in English as "really," but, like its English gloss, it has a variety of referential and interactive functions in discourse, e.g. as a backchannel response ("really?"). Its "functional itinerary" is in fact remarkably similar to that of the Hebrew *be'emet* explored by Maschler and Estlein (2008), even down to its construction.[6] When Khachik uses *vâq'an* in line 1, he says it forcefully and

[6] *Be* serves the same prepositional function in both languages, and it can also be used in deriving adverbs in Persian e.g. *be sor'at* ('quickly') and *be tadrij* ('gradually').

his voice rises on the second syllable in a way that suggests he is taking an evaluative stance (Du Bois 2007: 139) toward Shah Abbas, who, despite having driven the Armenians from their original homes, has kept his promise to provide them with land and a safe haven when, being a king, he could have just as easily gone back on his word. In fact, the way Khachik uses *vâq'an* here suggests that, for him, not only has Shah Abbas fulfilled his promise to the Armenians, but he has gone above and beyond in doing so. This portrayal of Shah Abbas contradicts the expectation I had coming into these kinds of discussions that I alluded to eariler in that it presents him not as a villain who separated Armenian Iranians from their homeland, but almost as a kind of deliverer. During part of the conversation, Khachik also alludes to the fact that strategic considerations related to the war with the Ottoman Empire necessitated Shah Abbas's removal of the Armenians from Julfa, suggesting that Shah Abbas's hands were tied.

Maryam also indexes an evaluative stance in her contribution in lines 6 and 7, incorporating what Tannen refers to as "constructed dialogue" (Tannen 1986) to position figures within a story world and "animate" and "author" their dialogue (Goffman 1974) in ways that offer insight into the speaker's stance toward them. Maryam's constructed dialogue animates the Armenians in this narrative as figures (McCawley 1999) in a way that allows Maryam to make a kind of comment on them, both for herself and for an audience (e.g. Avni 2013: 238): When the Armenians in her narrative say, "Just give us a place with a river. (It should have) a river and land. We'll live there. We'll make our own way there," Maryam uses the Armenians' own words to show that they are simple, low-maintenance, peace-loving, hard-working, and appreciative of nature. Rather than fight

Shah Abbas and resist their capture and deportation, all the Armenians in Maryam's narrative want is a river and land on which they can build a new life for themselves.

In this excerpt, Khachik and Maryam construct a meaningful historical portrayal of Shah Abbas and the Armenians in which they do not so much have a conqueror-conquered relationship as they do a symbiotic one. Shah Abbas, rather than being a vicious conqueror who kidnaps the Armenians and forcibly moves them to Iran, appears here as an upright, honorable man who keeps his word. He also gets what he wants in taking out a potential Ottoman stronghold later on. Likewise, the Armenians in Maryam's narrative appear to be more or less happy with the move as long as they can continue living their low-maintenance, pastoral lives next to a river. As I will show, framing the coming of Armenians to Iran as something other than an unnatural and unfortunate stroke of bad luck is only one of several ways to challenge prevalent ideas about Armenians as unwilling to align with Iranians or as outsiders or foreigners in Iran.

Situating selves among disparate diaspora groups

Upon arriving to the US, Armenian Iranians face a kind of choice: With whom to align, and when? Large Armenian and Iranian diaspora communities already exist in the United States, each with their own political lobbying organizations, cultural foundations, and more localized community-based groups. When asked, however, Armenian Iranians often say that they are "Armenian from Iran" as a way to align partially with both categories and fully with neither. At the same time, they claim a space for an entirely new category.

Certain politicized aspects of the Armenian Iranians' refugee status also

complicate any straightforward identification with the Iranian community. Even by some community members' own admission, the "refugee" designation for Armenian Iranians among the wider Iranian community in the US and Southern California in particular is controversial. This is primarily because many Iranians in the US believe that the Islamic Republic mostly targets Baha'is (and, to a lesser extent, Iranian Jews) for systematic persecution, whereas many assume that Armenians live in relative comfort and security in their own enclaves within Tehran and Esfahan. I found myself privy to a variety of opinions on this issue (especially within other Iranian religious minority groups in the US), opinions which seem to be rarely articulated directly to the Armenians themselves. This means that not only does the debate remain unsettled, but even unargued in a practical sense. In the same way that I occasionally heard someone wondering aloud just what Armenians in Iran had gone through to deserve refugee status, in the company of Armenians I have occasionally found myself an audience for what comes off as rebuttals of these claims. This is despite the fact that my policy has always been to avoid proposing these doubts and debates for discussion for fear of being seen as taking a position myself. In much the same way, participants appear to respond to these concerns in these interviews.

The stretch of dialogue immediately preceding this excerpt from my interview with Alen and Ani has to do with what they said were the main differences between Armenians from Armenia and Armenians from Iran. Following this, I mention offhandedly that when I first started working in this community, I wondered to what degree Armenians from Iran felt close to Armenians from Armenia as opposed to non-

Armenian Iranians. I then ask them to which group they feel they relate more, which prompts Alen to take an extended turn:

Excerpt 3

1 A: *Na, māl-e Iran.*
2 Ad: *Aha. Be māl-e Iran nazdikta- (.) ehsās-e nazdiki mikonin.*
3 A: *Are khob ādam (...) masan (..) chejuri begam (.) farz kon shomā ye*
4 *dusti dāshti māl-e Texās-e (.) vaqti sohbat mikoni az ye mantaqe-i ye*
5 *jāyi ke masalan (.) unam hame-ye in etelā'āto dāre (.) bishtar adām be*
6 *delesh michasbe ke masalan rāje' be chi sohbat mikoni rājeb- kodum*
7 *mantaqe kodum rudkhune masalan chizi sohbat mikoni…*

--

1 A: No, (the people from) Iran.
2 Ad: Aha. You feel clos- closer to (the people from) Iran.
3 A: Yeah (…) for example (one) (..) how do I say (.) imagine you had a friend
4 who is from Texas (.) when you talk about a region or a place for example
5 (.) s/he has all the same information (.) one finds it much more pleasant
6 that for example what- which region, which river, for example, that you're
7 talking about.

Alen responds without hesitation that he feels closer to Iranians in the US, but he expands on his answer in an interesting way. First of all, both in this excerpt and throughout our conversation he uses what Thackston (1993: 137) refers to as the "totally impersonal" pronoun[7] *ādam* ("one" e.g. "one might say…") to explain why he feels the way he does about a given subject, and he uses it to begin explaining his feelings here, but he appears to hesitate a bit before going in a different direction. That he defaults to this construction before changing directions suggests that he was preparing to offer an even more abstracted example to explain his answer than he ultimately does. Alen also uses the second-person familiar imperative of "to assume," (*farz kon*), and the discursive function

[7] See also De Fina and King, 2011: 174, who refer to this construction as the "non-committal" pronoun.

is to prompt me to indulge him in a thought experiment about my own life and the choices I might make. Alen makes the thought experiment even more effective by adding biographical information he has learned about me (specifically, that I was born and raised in Texas). In line 5 he also switches back to the "totally impersonal" *ādam* in line 5 again before concluding his thought. Furthermore, he frames his response as though shared place and its associated geographical features are the more important or desirable commonalities to have with others: He refers to a "river" above in line 6 and a "tree" a few lines down the transcript.

Hayk similarly aligns with an Iranian identity, but he does so in this instance by taking an extended turn to praise Iran's literary heritage. This excerpt occurs as Hayk is wrapping up his thoughts:

Excerpt 4

1 *H: Molāna o Hāfez o Sa'di o Khayyām o inā vaq'an shā'erā-ye kheili qavi va*
2 *nevisandā-ye kheili khubi dārim. Mo'āser. Sādeq-e Hedāyat. Ketāba-ye kheili*
3 *qashangi neveshte, va kheili ta'sirgozār. Nevisandā-ye khubi dārim.*

--

1 H: Rumi and Hafez and Sa'di and Khayyam and (the rest) (.) really strong poets (.) and
2 we have really good authors (.) contemporary (.) Sadegh Hedayat (.) wrote really
3 beautiful books, and very influential. We have good authors.

Notable about this excerpt is Hayk's display of epistemic authority, which he does by speaking at length on Iran's literary legacy in general and by listing some of Iran's most prominent poets. Although he says later that reading and reciting poetry is not something "just anyone can do," he clearly considers himself at least somewhat knowledgeable on the subject, and he even demonstrates his capacity as a performer later to me by reading me a few lines of Hafez, telling me the meaning of each line after he finishes. Key to the

excerpt, however, is Hayk's use of the present tense first person plural *dārim* ("we have") in talking about Iran's great poets. Not only does the use of present tense index a sense of timelessness and durability about Iran's literary legacy, but Hayk's inclusion of himself among the shareholders of this literary legacy is a strong act of adequation.

In aligning with Iranians in excerpt 3, Alen achieves several different things, and he does so in revealing ways: Firstly, he distinguishes himself from Armenians from Armenia (referred to hereafter as *Hayastanciner* - the Armenian word for Armenians from The Republic of Armenia), an act that has a direct link to the home visit context. Stereotypes about *Hayastanciner* persist in Glendale in particular and around Los Angeles in general, both within the Armenian diaspora and in mainstream society: When I organized a St. Patrick's Day trip to a Glendale dive bar with some recently arrived Armenian refugees, the evening took an awkward turn when the white stand-up comedians told racist jokes about Armenians to the laughter and applause of the mostly white audience. Armenian Iranians are aware of the stereotypes and sometimes explicitly invoke them as reasons for distinguishing themselves from *Hayastanciner*. One of the most commonly cited reasons for refusing to align with *Hayastanciner* is what Armenian Iranians perceive to be their generally cold, impersonal demeanor, supposedly a result of the deleterious influence of decades of Soviet rule on Armenian society. The effect of Soviet rule is in fact one of several go-to explanations for the most pervasive *Hayastanciner* stereotype: The Armenian as tax cheat, insurance fraud, and welfare abuser. As Anny Bakalian points out, this pernicious stereotype of Armenians in California goes back to the 1920s (1993: 20). Armenian Iranians who have come to the

US through the refugee program pride themselves on having "followed the rules," and the most frequently cited reason for wanting to distinguish oneself from *Hayastanciner* is the desire to avoid being labeled with the "lawbreaker" stereotype by mainstream US society.

Alen also aligns more closely with Iranians by invoking a timeless and apolitical aspect of Iran: the country's natural beauty. Hayk does the same thing, but he invokes Iran's literary legacy. Alen's carefully measured response also suggests that his alignment with Iranians is despite certain factors that make this alignment difficult or untenable, namely the oppression of political and religious minorities and the enforcement of public and private morality in general by the Islamic Republic, the country's negative reputation abroad, and the generally negative portrayal of both the Iranian government and Iranians in mainstream media outlets in the US. A common pattern both in my experiences as a case worker and in these interviews was for people to follow heavier talk about religious and political suppression in the present day with seemingly obligatory mentions of Iran's geographical features, its varying climate throughout the four seasons, and its rich literary and cultural heritage. Both Iran's geographic features and the medieval Persian poets came long before the Islamic Republic and are generally uncontroversial aspects in contemporary Iran, making them easier aspects of Iranian culture and society with which to align here.

Illustrative narratives and the Iranian state

Illustrative narratives, particularly those involving encounters with persons or entities that are representative of the Iranian state and authority figures in general, offer another means of resolving the tensions involved with ethnic alignment and self-

presentation in the home visit by positing a kind of solidarity with ordinary Iranians increasingly marginalized by a repressive theocratic state. The following excerpt comes from my conversation with Seroj and Marta. Marta actively told stories and mentioned that she had done a great deal of thinking the previous night and had even taken some notes before our interview. In this excerpt, Seroj has just finished commenting on how alcohol was legal, manufactured, and commercially available in Iran prior to the revolution. This mention of alcohol prompts Marta to tell a story:

Excerpt 5

M: [laughs] ye daf'e hālâ mā ye (.) bāgh-e kuchiki dāshtim Karaj, khārej az shahr
A: Uhuh
M: Ye ruzam mehmun dāshtim un ruz ruz-e entekhābāt bud
Ba'd Seroj jān ye gālon (.) inqadi por kard (.) mā masihi hastim
mitunim dāshte bāshim nemikhorim ke (.) gozāsht tu sanduq
aqab tuye yakhchāl o (.) gusht-e kabāb o inā hālā tu rāh dārim
mirim. Ye pesar-e javun bā aslahe: umad jelo. Sanduq aqab bāz
kon. Hālā harkesi hastesh mā fek mikonim pāsdāre dige che
midunestim? Ke in lebāsāro ke hame mipushidan. Sanduq aqab
bāz kard in chie? Gof hichi araqe. Gof barāye chi? Gof mā masihi
hastim mā mehmun dārim, birun ke nakhordim. Na na! Ejāze
nadārid, man ino bar midāram ba'd az zohr biāid pāsgāh,
khodetuno mo'arefi konid.

--

M: [laughs] one time we had a small garden in Karaj, outside of the city
A: Uhuh
M: One day we had a guest (.) that day was the day of the elections
then Seroj jan filled up about a gallon (.) [holds out arms] this much.
We're Christians, we can have it, we won't drink it (.) he put it in the trunk in the fridge
and (.) the meat for kabab and all that and now we're on the road. A young man with a
rifle: comes up Open the trunk. Now whoever it is we think he's a *Pasdar*, what do we
know? Everyone is dressed the same way. He opened the trunk what is this? He (Seroj)

9 said nothing just *araq*. He said what for? He said we're Christians we have a guest,
10 we're not drinking it outside. No no! You're not allowed! I'm taking this, come present
11 yourselves to the police station this afternoon.

Here I want to focus especially on the use of quotatives. In line 7, when the young man with a rifle approaches the vehicle, Marta does not use the quotative *goftan* ("to say") to introduce his speech; she simply voices his dialogue in a quick, gruff manner ("a young man with a rifle comes up *Open the trunk!*"). Even in line 8, when we have already heard a rough description of the man and even some of his dialogue, Marta again elides the quotative ("He opened the trunk *What is this?*"). Once it is Seroj's turn to speak in Marta's story, he gets a quotative, and thus so does the rifle-wielding man immediately thereafter. But in line 10, again the rifle-wielding man gets no quotative, and he also uses formal stylistic features and verb inflection. When quoting the young man, Marta also reproduces what the man's speech might have been like, speaking loudly and harshly. Without context, one might think that Marta is telling this story as a means to demonstrate that Armenians were especially targeted, but she insists several lines down in the transcript that this kind of thing "happened to everyone." As I will show in a minute, this distinction matters.

This excerpt from my conversation with Khachik and Maryam provides a slightly different take on this phenomenon. Khachik has just spent a few minutes talking about the mandatory military service he had to perform as a young man before he and Maryam married, and here he launches into a memory:

Excerpt 6

1 K: Ba'd (...) raftim khedmat, do sāl khedmat (.) chār māh āmuzeshim
2 tamām nashode bud āqā:: chār māh āmuzeshim tamām nashode ye ruz

didam umadan sedā kardan (..)āqāye (Davoudian). Raftam birun bale. Daftar mikhānet. Raftam mano mikhān chi kār konan, chi kār kardam, mitarsidim sarbāz budim dige. Raftam daftar goftan ke boro (..) uh kise-ye enferādi (...) eh kise-ye enferādi un chizāi ke behet midan kafsh o chizā-ye zāpās- lebāsā-ye zāpās ke midan ye kise bud mirikhtim tu un kise be un migoftim kise-ye enferādi. Miri kisato jam mikoni miāi miri bandar Pahlavi. Cherā? Ta'mirgāh mikhānet.

--

K: Then (...) we went to service, two years of service (.) my four months of training still hadn't completed (man::) my four months of training still hasn't finished and one day I saw they came and called me. Mr. Davoudian. I went outside, yes. They want you at the office. I went (there) what do they want to do with me, what did I do? We were afraid, we were soldiers. I went to the office they said go (..) uh fill your carryout bag – the carryout bag you fill it with all those things they give you, shoes and the uniform, it was a bag we would dump it all into. You'll go gather your carryout bag and go to Bandar Pahlavi. Why? They want you at the repairs depot.

This story is different from the one Marta tells above in that Khachik retells a pleasant memory rather than one of a time that he was accosted by police, but, importantly, this story contains an air of suspense due to the presence of authority figures. Khachik begins the story not knowing what "they" want, and when "they" come to get him in lines 3 and 4, he quotes them without a saying verb, just as Marta did before.

This pattern regarding quotatives appears again and again in stories involving run-ins with Iranian authority figures, and even when other characters figure prominently in the story worlds, they receive quotatives, whereas the dialogue of the authority figures does not. Marta tells a great many stories throughout our conversation from her days as a nurse in the Iran-Iraq War and as a mother of teenage children in 1980s and 90s Iran, but

they are not "illustrative" (Schiffrin 2002) of that which I had expected before conducting the study. That is, they do not build an argument for Armenians in Iran as uniquely targeted or oppressed as much as they implicitly emphasize their own solidarity with other Iranians suffering under the Islamic Republic's policies of enforcing a certain kind of private and public morality. Similarly, Khachik draws a connection between himself and his peers in the military (presumably non-Armenians for the most part) by stepping outside the story frame in lines 5 and 6 to tell me that "we were afraid, we were soldiers." This act of adequation is contingent upon a separation from the authority figure embodied in the "they" who come to call him and his fellow soldiers, and the elision of quotatives contributes to this distance and detachment.

Conclusion

The home visit occurs at a time in which Armenian Iranians find themselves in a new sociocultural context alongside fellow Armenian speakers, some of whom Armenian Iranians see as culturally distinct or otherwise have spent a greater amount of time in the US. Additionally, Armenian Iranians must negotiate the complexities carried over from the realities of contemporary life in Iran when choosing how and when to identify with Los Angeles's sizable Iranian community. The opportunity for reflection and self-presentation afforded by the home visit reveals how Armenians situate themselves within this landscape and deal with the tension of identifying with a nation and a people but also proving even after resettlement that the Armenians in Iran deserve special consideration for refugee status.

The Armenian Iranian participants in this study take the home visit as an opportunity first and foremost to frame their own stories as part of the larger story of Armenians on the Iranian plateau. As I have shown, for these participants, this narrative begins not with any ancient Armenian kingdom, but with the Armenian community in Esfahan. The means by which the Armenians came to Esfahan also factor into the construction of Armenian Iranian identity presented here in that participants portray it not so much as a forced migration as a move agreed upon by all sides.

Additionally, when aligning with an Iranian identity, drawing from discourses of Iran's wealth of natural resources and rich cultural heritage in an uncontroversial way can be one resource with which these speakers can positively evaluate and align with certain facets of Iranian culture and history while maintaining distance from what they hold to be its more negative aspects. Iran's geographical landscape and centuries-old cultural and artistic heritage can be invoked as depoliticized virtues and in a way that posits them as belonging both to Iranian Muslims and all of Iran's ethnic minorities. Finally, telling illustrative narratives that characterize the authoritarianism of those in power as intrinsically opposed to regular people can be a means of both aligning against the injustices of the state while claiming solidarity with Iranians as a whole. In the next chapter, I will examine some of the more local interactional dynamics, stances, and interactant roles that participants adopt during the home visit and the implications that these have for the home visit as a methodological tool.

Chapter Four

Introduction

Although the home visit reveals certain aspects of Armenian Iranian identity upon arriving to the US, the more localized aspects of these speakers' identities have certain consequences for the interaction as a data-gathering method and as a site for identity construction. In this chapter I address the gender-relevant aspects of these identities and how they shape participants' contributions and the interaction as a whole.

According to Ochs and Taylor, contemporary linguistic anthropological scholarship sees gender ideologies and identities as "closely linked to the management of asymmetries" (Ochs and Taylor 1995: 97) and are "socialized, sustained, and transformed through talk, particularly through verbal practices that recur innumerable times in the lives of social groups." (Ochs 1992: 336) Therefore, examining these particular multiparty interactions with a pair of spouses speaking openly together should be able to offer insight into how these identities play out in our conversations and what consequences this can have for the success of the sociolinguistic interview.

This chapter owes a great deal to Elinor Ochs's influential discussion of the indexical links between language and gender (1992) and Bucholtz and Hall's emphasis on the "interactional positions that social actors briefly occupy and then abandon as they respond to the contingencies of unfolding discourse" in their "positionality" principle of identity (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 591-593). Ochs argues that while the approach of much of earlier scholarly investigation into language and gender involved "a simple straightforward mapping of linguistic form to social meaning of gender" (Ochs 1992:

336), a more productive approach, she says, quoting Austin (1962), is to look at what men and women "do with words" (Ochs 1992: 344). The key to understanding this, Ochs argues, is to understand the relation of language to gender as "mediated by the relation of language to stances, social acts, social activities, and other social constructs" (337). According to Ochs, the indexical relationship between language and gender is very rarely a direct one (the obvious exceptions being gendered pronouns and referential kinship terms), and in fact speakers make use of a wide variety of linguistic resources including lexicon, morphology, syntax, dialect, and entire varieties to form direct indexical links not to the social category of gender itself, but rather to stances, acts, and social activities, which themselves become associated with the communication styles of a particular gender through repeated use.

In their influential study of "Father knows best" narratives at dinnertime in European American middle-class households, Ochs and Taylor (1995) build on these insights to show that language with direct indexical links to certain stances and acts can cohere into interactional roles and dynamics that constitute gender asymmetries. Specifically, they showed how narrative practices of mothers and fathers instantiated a "father knows best" dynamic in which the "father is set up – through his own and others' recurrent narrative practices – to be primary audience, judge, and critic of family members' actions, conditions, thoughts, and feelings as narrative protagonists or as co-narrators." (1995: 99)

Bucholtz and Hall incorporate this work into their framework for the analysis of identity in interaction by emphasizing that identity is constituted not only at various

levels of language use, but also at various degrees of locality and temporality. They argue that it is partly by way of the repeated iteration of the kinds of local and situated interactional positions and dynamics that Ochs and Taylor explore in the dinnertime interactions through which more macro-level identity categories such as, for example, "women" or "Armenian from Iran," take on "ideological coherence" (Bucholtz and Hall 2005:591) for speakers.

In looking up close at these stances and social acts that are themselves constitutive of gendered identity, I hope to explore why men contributed much more to the dicussions and how my own commitment to eliciting exactly equal contributions fits in to this project. My central contention in this chapter begins with the idea that all of the participants in these interviews – myself included – appear to have differing interactional goals and commitments. While there are certainly nonverbal aspects to consider, this is reflected most apparently in our differential use of language with indexical links to certain stances, acts, and types of speaker-hearer relationships. The men ultimately command the floor more often, take longer turns, and speak to me in a way that constructs me as both a listener and a "learner," at the same time casting themselves as "educators." To achieve this they use forms that index a more formal, institutional, even pedagogical encounter between them and myself during their extended turns. On the other hand, in order to hold the floor and take longer turns, they make use of a variety of forms that lessen the social distance between us and invoke our shared male status. Thanks in part to my own compliance, they often do this to the desired effect.

The women's lower degree of participation in the talk at hand can be explained in part by local practices regarding hospitality, the requirements of attending to the needs of houseguests, and the spatial arrangement of participants. Additionally, they seem to have my own face needs as a major concern. By this I mean that they occasionally take stances against the men or even act in a way that can be read as threatening of their face, and they do this most interestingly by using forms more often associated with male speech. Finally, they appear to have a somewhat different idea from the men regarding exactly what I as a researcher expect to get out of the interaction.

Considering some nonverbal aspects of the interviews

Before we begin fleshing out how language use in these interviews constitutes gender asymmetries, let us first consider the aspects of the encounter that extend beyond the verbal and into the realms of spatial arrangement of participants and sociocultural norms regarding politeness and hospitality, of which language is only one tool in the box. As I will show, both where participants sat and Iranian standards of entertaining a guest had an effect on how the interviews proceeded.

Upon entering participants' homes, I was shown to a table or a couch, at which I usually just grabbed a seat at random. The men would then either sit next to me on a corner or directly next to me on the same side of the table, whereas the women almost always sat across the table from me or on the other side of the man on a perpendicular couch. As I will show later, this arrangement also allowed men to contribute more to the discussions by using certain features of body language. In fact, only during the interview with Khachik and Maryam would it have even been possible for Maryam to sit next to me

without it seeming somewhat awkward (the seat next to me on the corner was free), but she chose to sit opposite me. Perhaps not so coincidentally, her seat happened to be the closest one to the kitchen, which leads me to my next point.

For a brief time I considered trying to conduct the interviews outside of people's homes, but I eventually decided that the potential logistical issues and the risk of participants being less comfortable and willing to share wouldn't be worth it. Of course, conducting interviews in homes meant that I would have to contend with my own status as a guest. Iranian society places great value on guests and Iranians themselves often tout this as a virtue of Iranian culture and a benefit of visiting Iran as a foreigner, and especially as an American, as I have been told more times than I can count. Hayk and Loosik told me several anecdotes about what they characterized as the extreme hospitality of the Lur people in Lorestan province, where Hayk was born. They said that it was common for people to put themselves out seriously for a guest by, for example, sacrificing the family's most valuable goat out of the only two or three they had for the night's meal. There are also intricate and ritualized ways of doing Iranian hospitality in an interaction that can seem overwhelming to the unitiated Westerner: When I once took my parents to meet an older Zoroastrian couple from Yazd (a city also famed for its hospitality) who lived down the street from me, I didn't sufficiently prepare them for the encounter, and they were obviously embarrassed and uncomfortable at the amount of trouble their hosts seemed to be going to.

Even though the hosts in these cases likely understood that my cultural background would entail different expectations regarding treatment of guests (that is, my

expectations would almost certainly be relatively lower), I still found that the women spent much time between the table or couch and the kitchen, making tea and coffee, grabbing things from the kitchen, and making sure the guest had something to drink and something on his plate. My first visit to Alen and Ani's house to ask them to participate in the interview anticipated this methodological snag. When all was said and done and I wanted to set a time to come two days later, I offered to come at 2 PM, thinking that that would give them a chance to have lunch and maybe a nap. When Ani suggested to her daughter in Armenian that I come for lunch, I politely offered that 2 might be better, but then Ani's daughter insisted. Indeed, why would I bother coming over if I wasn't going to get a meal out of it? In the logic of Iranian hospitality, it just didn't make sense. In fact, I ended up eating full meals during two of the visits.

All of this is to say that these standards of hospitality and conduct in the presence of a guest meant that the women spent a considerable amount of time on the periphery or even completely outside of the area in which the talk took place. Especially on the visit to Alen and Ani's, where a meal was also on the table for roughly the first twenty minutes of the interview, Ani spent a lot of time between the table and the kitchen. When the meal was over and we had talked for a while, Alen suggested we move to the couches in the nearby living room, but Ani stayed between the kitchen and the table, where she read a magazine.

In fact, in all four interviews, it just so happened that I sat at the seat furthest from the kitchen and the women sat at the one closest to it, facilitating their moving back and forth between the talking area and the kitchen. Unless one happens to be in the middle of

shouting angrily, getting up even for a second from a conversation is almost always an effective yielding of the floor to other speakers who are still seated. This meant that the many times when the women I interviewed got up to go to the kitchen provided opportunities for my male interlocutor and I to engage each other directly, and lines of dialogue developed that the women naturally contributed less to, not having been sitting down when they had begun. Although this is a crucial part of how the interactions came to be shaped as primarily oriented toward the men and their contributions, it is only one part. I will now turn to the linguistic aspects of how this came about, showing how all participants, including myself, played a role in bringing about this dynamic.

Taking and holding the floor

The very beginning of my conversation with Khachik and Maryam contains so many salient examples of what I want to discuss in this chapter that I will start with two excerpts from it. The first thing I noticed when transcribing this interview was that not only does Maryam contribute relatively little to the conversation, but it is mostly because Khachik prevents her from doing so in various ways. Khachik sets the precedent for this at the very beginning of the interview:

Excerpt 7

1 *A: Okay (..) mikhāstin ye chizi begin alān. Goftin ye chizi yādam umad?*
2 *K: Na dige un roshane*
3 *A: Ah, nemigin? Chun in roshane nemigin?*
4 *M: [laughs]*
5 *K: [laughs]*
6 *M: joke-e*
7 *K: Begam?*
8 *A: Begin begin.*

9 *K: Ye ruz ye āqāi (.) umad o (.) daro zad o umad tu az in hamsāyā-ye khodemun injā*

10 *Ba'd (.) goft ke-*

11 *M: -injā bud yā Tehrān bud?*

12 *K: [gives Adam exasperated look]*

13 *A: [laughs]*

14 *M: Tehrān bud? yā::*

15 *K: [laughs]*

16 *A: Khob?*

17 *K: ba'd goft ke::…*

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1 A: Okay (..) you wanted to say something just now. You said you remembered something?

2 K: No, that thing is on [gesturing to recorder]

3 A: Ah, you won't say? Because this is on you won't say?

4 M: [laughs]

5 K: [laughs]

6 M: It's a joke.

7 K: Should I say (it)?

8 A: Say (it), say (it).

9 K: One day a man came and knocked on the door and came in, one of our neighbors here

10 Then (.) he said that--

11 M: --Was it here or in Tehran?

12 K: [gives Adam exasperated look]

13 A: [laughs]

14 M: Was it Tehran or::

15 K: [laughs]

16 A: Okay?

17 K: Then he said…

Much happens in this excerpt that is emblematic of how this particular discussion proceeded. After muttering something to myself about how the recorder is on and working, line 1 is the first thing said in the interview directed at someone else. Just before I turned on the recorder, Khachik had mentioned that he remembered a funny story he wanted to tell. However, after I invite his telling in line 1, he says in line 2 that he won't

say because of the recorder. Not knowing whether he's joking, I ask him half playfully and half pleadingly whether he is really not going to talk because of the recorder. When Maryam begins laughing, Khachik does too, and when she picks up on the fact that I'm not sure whether he's joking, she tells me he is in line 6. Following this, Khachik uses a first person subjunctive verb *begam* with a rising interrogative tone at the end ("should I say?") that invites me to ask him once again to tell his story. Following my elicitation in line 8, he begins the story. In just this little stretch of time at the very beginning of the interview, Khachik demonstrates that he is adept at "launching" a narrative (Ochs and Capps 2001:113-129). He does this by proposing the telling of the story before I turn on the recorder, by playfully acting like he doesn't want to say it once the recorder is on, and then finally by making me ask him for a second time to tell it. Also, Maryam demonstrates a concern for my own face needs here by explaining to me that Khachik is joking.

What happens next is also important for how the conversation proceeds. Once Khachik begins to tell his story, Maryam interjects in line 11, asking him whether the story he is telling took place in Glendale or in Tehran. At this point, Khachik casts me an exhausted look and rolls his eyes. Most regrettably, I found the look as well as the laughter forming on his face too infectious to bear. Once I begin to laugh, Khachik sees that his joke at Maryam's expense has landed, and he too begins laughing. All it then takes is my final *khob?* ("well?") in line 16 inviting Khachik to continue to guarantee that Maryam's contribution goes completely unacknowledged other than to be mocked and laughed at. Khachik continues with his story. With my laughter and my invitation for

Khachik to continue without acknowledging Maryam, I undermine my own project of encouraging a higher degree of contribution from the women in this study.

Once Khachik begins telling the story, which is about a man coming to the door asking him to sign a petition to install a security camera in the complex's parking lot, the sound of silverware and plates clinking together emerges from nearby. Not only has Maryam just sustained a severe loss of face (Goffman 1967: 8-9), having just had her contribution mocked and laughed at by the two male speakers sitting at the table, but she is now in the kitchen, on the periphery of the discussion. The next excerpt takes place once Khachik has concluded his story and I am asking him some follow-up questions. At one point, Maryam attempts to make up for her earlier loss of face:

Excerpt 8

1 *K: Shavāhed jam konim ke citi biāre injā durbin nasb kone durbin-e makhfi bezane*
2 *Khob nayāvordan.*
3 *A: Mmhm.*
4 *K: NEmiāre khob KHARJ dāre un! A:laki ke nist ke!*
5 *A: Yāru a-taraf-e ki- kodum komite kodum guruh umade bud emzā begire, khodesh*
6 *faqat māl-e in <sākhtemun>*
7 *K: <Mostajer> bud. Are.*
8 *A: Ah.*
9 *K: Khodesh injā mostajer bud.*
10 *A: Ba'd durbin nazadan, ha?*
11 *K: Na. Pārking durbin nadārim.*
12 *A: Ishāllā ke dozd dige nayād [laughs]*
13 *K: A:::h*
14 *M: Khob hālā un Te- uh jā- un Te- unke Tehrān (.) unam begu.*
15 *K: Kodumo man che midunam kodume?*
16 *M: [dialogue in Armenian]*
17 *K: [dialogue in Armenian]*
18 *M: [dialogue in Armenian] [laughs]*

19 *K: [laughs] āre āre hālā sab kon, hālā (.) yeki az- ye ruz Tehrān neshaste budim…*

---

1 K: (The man was saying) let's collect signatures so that the city will install a camera here.
2 Well they never brought it
3 A: Mmhm.
4 K: They aren't gonna bring it! It COSTS a lot! It's not just some JOKE!
5 A: Was the guy from- which committee or group had he come from? Was he just a guy in
6 this <building>
7 K: <He was a> tenant here. Yeah.
8 A: Ah.
9 K: He was a tenant here.
10 A: And they didn't install the camera, huh?
11 K: No. We don't have a camera in the parking lot.
12 A: God willing no thieves will come [laughs]
13 K: A:::h
14 M: Okay now tell the- tell- tell the Tehran one.
15 K: Which one, I don't know anything about it.
16 M: [dialogue in Armenian]
17 K: I don't remember…
18 M: [dialogue in Armenian] [laughs]
19 K: [laughs] Yeah yeah okay now wait now (.) one of- one day we were sitting in Tehran…

I mentioned earlier that the women being on the periphery or entirely outside of the area in which talk occurred opened a channel for more direct engagement between myself and my male interlocutor. With Maryam in the kitchen, this is precisely what happens here: My use of the more colloquial *yâru* ("guy"), my elision of the final z in *az* ("from"), and my somewhat sarcastic use of *ishâllâ* ("God willing") index a less formal speech situation and, immediately preceding this, Khachik also uses a particular feature of informal speech to which I will return to in a moment. The point is that the cumulative effect of many moments like this is to shape the interaction as primarily of one between the two men.

In line 14, Khachik's story has finished and Maryam speaks up again. She tells Khachik to tell "the Tehran one," but he dismisses this immediately, claiming to have no idea what she's talking about. At once Maryam code switches to Armenian, speaking quickly and for several seconds, presumably jogging his memory. Again he denies knowledge of the story she's describing. When she speaks Armenian for a few more seconds, he finally appears to remember, telling her *sab kon* ("wait!") and saying *hâlâ* ("now"), the latter being a means by which Persian speakers can reclaim the floor or return from a parenthetical aside to the main plot of a story. Maryam thus succeeds in reclaiming some face. She wasn't just interjecting for the sake of interjecting; there really was a "Tehran one," even if it took her several seconds of speaking Armenian to Khachik to jog his memory. But her success is only partial: Maryam's reclamation of face has come at the expense of Khachik telling yet another story, and his role as main storyteller is further enforced.

I want to return to Khachik's use of a certain informal speech form in line 4 above. In fact it would be more accurate to describe it as a particular manner of articulation: When Khachik utters key parts of line 4 ("They aren't gonna bring it! It costs A LOT! It's not just some JOKE!"), he does so while closing his mouth almost entirely, jutting out his bottom lip slightly, furrowing his brow, and lowering his chin toward his chest, to the effect that the words become somewhat grave and muffled. The stance Khachik assumes in this usage is that he knew all along that the tenant committee would be unable to convince the city to install a camera. Furthermore, such a thing just

doesn't happen because you ask for it, and the man who came to the door was naïve for thinking so. Furthermore, it is not an issue that concerns Khachik very much.

The stylistic form Khachik uses here is strongly associated with a particular social class of Iranian men known as *lâts*. In his book *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ*, Hooman Majd says that

> "The laat holds a special place in Iranian culture: a place that at times can be compared to the popular position of a mafioso in American culture, albeit without the extreme violence associated with him, and at other times a place of respect and admiration for the working-class code he lives by…the jahel, and the laat to a lesser degree, represented the ultimate in Iranian machismo, Iranian mardanegi, or "manliness," in a supremely macho culture. Upper-class youths affected their speech, much as upper-class white youths in America affect the speech of inner-city blacks." (NPR)

Despite its utter ubiquity and variety in terms of discursive and interactional functions in spoken Persian, I have been unable to find any scholarly work that explores the affective or evaluative dimensions of this interesting stylistic feature of modern Persian speech. Time and time again in these interviews, what I call the *laat* form is used variously to a) wrap up a thought when one is struggling to remember or articulate something; b) somehow distance oneself from or even openly disapprove of the foregoing utterance of another speaker; c) affect a kind of nonchalance in response to an "admirative" (Maschler and Estlein 2008: 292-293) conveying surprise or disbelief such as *vâq'an* from excerpt 2 in chapter three; and d) to introduce a new line of thought that is in some way at odds with the line one has just finished, usually accompanied by the expressions *albatte* ("of course…") or *dar har surat* ("in any case…"). Uses by men account for nearly all occurrences of the *laat* form in these interviews, with a few notable exceptions, to which I will turn momentarily.

Once talk was thoroughly in progress, men made much greater use of discursive resources for holding the floor and taking extended turns to frame the encounters as primarily pedagogical ones, creating mutual teacher-learner roles that sometimes (and especially in Khachik and Maryam's case) left the women in the position of having to find a place in this dynamic. Take, for example, this excerpt from my conversation with Seroj and Marta. Seroj is in the middle of an extended turn in which he describes his perception of the status of Armenians in Iran before and after the 1979 revolution. His general point is that although strife certainly existed, in general Armenians were trusted and presumed by Muslims to be honest and forthright in business and interpersonal relationships. Here he describes a typical New Year's Eve (on the Gregorian calendar) for Armenians:

Excerpt 9

1 *S: Masalan shab-e zhānviyye ke mishod (..) khalife migoft ke sā'at-e*
2 *davāzdah ke sa'at (.) exactly sāl tahvil mishe:: da'vat mikard montāhā mā*
3 *nemiraftim! Da'vat mikard ke biāid sāl tahvil tu kelisā bāshid.*
4 *Qabul? Kheili khub. Hālā mā farzan davāzdah o nim ba'd az kābāre*
5 *miraftim tu kelisā. Mididim dar kelisā ye dune darbun bud. (..) Arā-*
6 *Mosalmunā shab-e zhānviyye ro [unint] karde budan masalan se kilo shirini*
7 *miāvord mizāsht dam-e dar-*
8 *M: Masalan sar-e khodeshun miāmadan*
9 *S: Are!*
10 *M: Security mikardan ke ettefāqi-*
11 *S: Miduni chetor? Hamishe taht-o hemāyye budim. Che dar zamān-e shāh, va che ba'd az*
12 *enqelāb. (..) AMĀ safe nabudim.*

---

1 S: For example on New Year's Eve (..)
2 (at) 12 (.) exactly when the new year begins, (the church) would invite us but
3 we didn't go! They invited everyone to come and be in the church for the new year.

4 Agreed? Very well. (..) Now, say for example we would go around 12:30, after the cabaret
5 we would go to the church. We would see at the church there was a security guard. The
6 Arm- The Muslims had hired a security guard for us and brought say three kilos of sweets
7 and put them there by the door
8 M: For example they would come on their own .
9 S: Yeah!
10 M: The would (hire) security so that <nothing->
11 S: <You> know? We always had support. Be it during the time of the shah, or after
12 the revolution. BUT we weren't safe.

Seroj's talk bears many hallmarks of a formal lecture: He enunciates clearly, he takes many lengthy pauses, and, crucially, he punctuates his speech with verbal cues that are designed to elicit back channeling from me. Furthermore, the verbal cue he uses to achieve this first is *ghabul?*, an informal construction akin to the "agreed" two people might say when making a bet. The next time he uses a similar verbal cue (in line 11 – "You know?"), it is to interrupt Marta and reorient us to his turn. At the end of the excerpt, he raises his voice on "but" and then allows for a rather long pause when he is finished talking. This silence proves so effective that for nearly two seconds no one says anything, after which I ask him to clarify.

In general, the men otherwise made use of a variety of expressions that indexed an institutional encounter and casted me in the role of primary listener and "learner" and themselves as "educator." This included opening turns with the highly formal expression '*arz konam khedmat-e shomâ ke*... ("It is humbly stated that…") from excerpt 1 in chapter 3, an expression which can also be used when one wants to maintain the floor but must think more about one's answer. Another noticeable trend was the switch to a generally more formal register and more precise enunciation when talking about

historical events or explaining societal or religious aspects of Iran to me. Interestingly, they also punctuate these stretches of talk with less formal expressions like *motavajehi?* ("Do you understand?") and *miduni?* ("You know?") to elicit back channel responses from me during particularly long turns in which they described a particular period in Iran's contemporary history or an aspect of rural life.

Occasionally the expressions men used to structure and order narratives more overtly invoked our shared status as males. One example is the use of *âghâ* ("sir") to address me while still in the narrative frame, usually to introduce the climax of a narrative or a part tellers otherwise expected me to find surprising or amusing. Since I am younger than all of my participants, simply calling me "Adam" would be the most appropriate under most circumstances in which they would want to address me, but "*Âghâ-ye* Adam" could also be used to imbue one's speech with a bit more formality, and indeed participants used both forms in the strategic ways I mention above. But when speakers simply use *âghâ* on its own to address a younger person, and especially just before the climax of a narrative, it has an interactive function akin to North American men calling each other "man" or "dude" (e.g. De Fina 2011: 266). At one point during the actual home visits I conducted with Khachik and Maryam when they first arrived in the US a few years before, they were in the midst of a minor disagreement when, at the beginning of one of his rebuttals, Khachik addressed Maryam as *âghâ-ye 'aziz!* ("Dear sir!") This was such an unusual usage that I couldn't help but laugh, and its humor indeed lies in how it brings this underlying discourse feature of *âghâ!* or *âghâ-ye aziz!* to the level of consciousness by using it in a situation in which it seems ridiculous.

A last point to make in this regard requires a brief return to the impact of the spatial arrangement of people and objects on the conversations. Not only were men able to make use of speech forms that strategically indexed learner-teacher roles through more formal usages and invoke shared male status thorugh less formal and more gender-relevant expressions, but spatial arrangement also worked in their favor. Especially in Khachik and Seroj's case, sitting close together meant that they had an additional resource for grabbing my attention: touching. Since, as I mentioned, I ultimately decided not to film participants, I worked out a system in which I would tap "shave-and-a-haircut" (leaving out "two bits") on a hard surface each time one of the male participants touched my arm or shoulder. Unsurprisingly, going back and listening for these taps reveals that they occur most often during moments in which both participants seem to be vying for my attention.

I want to focus now on the women's interactional strategies in these interviews, particularly the ways in which they resisted some of the strategies used by men described above. This excerpt comes from a point during my conversation with Seroj and Marta in which Marta is describing a time when her daughter-in-law, who worked for an international company in Tehran, was taken to the police station along with all of her other female employees for not wearing headscarves at work:

Excerpt 10

1 *M: Raftan goftan masalan sanad-e khune bāyad bezāran āzād bokonan o inā, un reis*
2 *sherkateshun raft un moghe masa- khob kheili pul bud hezār toman jarime dād, katbi*
3 *neveshtan ke dige az in kara- az in ghalatā nemikonam! [laughs]*
4 *A: [laughs]*

5 *S: Ta'ahhod gerefta::n*
6 *M: Ah::*
7 *S: Miduni ta'ahhod yani chi?*
8 *M: Are dige. Qol.*
9 *A: Mmhm.*

--

1 M: They went and they said for example they would have to put down the house deed to free
2 them and all, the president of their company went and that time for ex- well it was a lot of
3 money! They were fined 5,000 tomans and they had to write that we won't- we won't screw
4 up like this again! [laughs]
5 A: [laughs]
6 S: They got a <*ta'aho::d*>
7 M: <Ah::>
8 S: Do you know what a *ta'ahhod* is?
9 M: Yeah of course. A promise.
10 A: Mmhm.

Marta has finished telling the climax, but in line 7 she cues that she has more to say. Before she can do this, however, Seroj has interjected with an educational aside which may provide him with an opportunity to take an extended turn. When he asks me if I know what a *ta'ahhod* (pledge, commitment) is, Marta interjects herself with "Yeah of course. A promise." This affirmation serves two purposes: It both cancels out the need for Seroj's impending educational aside and also displays a concern for my face needs.

This concern for face became particularly apparent near the end of my conversation with Alen and Ani. At one point, Alen implies that one thing that bothers him about life in the US is that he feels many Armenians who have moved there have abandoned certain conventions of everyday politeness. At first he very carefully broaches this subject, after which he mentions that the people responsible for this are "some people" he knows. He then mentions that some of the people are relatives of his, finally

saying that maybe the best solution is simply to become "just like them." When his condemnation becomes more apparent, Ani speaks up, insisting that "life is different here." When Alen implies that people who have abandoned these social conventions are lacking in *adab* ("manners") and even *ensâniyyat* ("humanity"), Ani chastises him in Armenian. When Alen ups the ante even further by implying that the problem has its roots in US society, Ani abandones talking to him and addresses me directly:

Excerpt

1 An: Sabk-e (Alen)- māl-e (Alen) (..) māl-e shast sāl-e pishe.

2 Ad: [laughs] Vāq'an?

3 An: Āre! Injurie. Alān (Alen)am un sabko mikhād piyāde kone nemishe!

4 Ad: Ādamāi ke ham senno sāl-e shomā bāshan:: ro…

5 An: Na nemikonan. Āgha hich kodum nemikonan. Faqat khodeshe.

--

1 An: Alen's style- Alen's way is the way of sixty years ago.

2 Ad: [laughs] Really?

3 An: Yeah! He's like this. Now Alen wants to bring that lifestyle here, it's impossible!

4 Ad: People who are also your age…

5 An: No they don't do it. *Āghā* nobody does it. It's just him.

For the several minutes preceding this excerpt, Alen and Ani mostly engage with each other, with Alen occasionally addressing me seeking back channel responses, which I provide. Once Alen implies that the problem is with US society, Ani addresses me directly in her strongest condemnation of Alen yet, saying that his is "the way of sixty years ago." Before I can finish a question about whether people Alen and Ani's age still value the same social conventions of politeness that Alen is talking about, Ani answers in the negative, addressing me as *āghā* to make her denouncement even weightier. This is

the only time during these interviews that a woman uses this particular form of address with me, and it is telling that it appears at a moment of severe disapproval.

Ani's position gradually hardened as Alen came closer and closer to a direct critique of US society and ultimately led to her taking a stance against him. At first she does this by using Armenian to chastise him, something which Loosik also used when she felt Hayk was talking too generally about Iran's history and geography. But Ani goes even further by directly addressing me to denounce Alen as stuck in the past, suggesting that she perceived Alen's problems with the US as somehow a threat to me.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have gone underneath the more active and self-aware processes associated with macro-level identity construction and explored the more local and temporary aspects of the speakers identities, including my own. Although I set out to try and elicit a roughly equal response ratio from both spouses, my efforts appear to have mostly failed again. I discussed both the verbal and nonverbal factors that I believe contributed to this asymmetry, including sociocultural understandings of proper hospitality, spatial arrangement of the participants, the disproportionate use of linguistic and discursive resources for taking and holding the floor, and the ability of both myself and my male interlocutors to index our shared male status with gender-relevant speech forms. I have also shown some of the ways in which women resist these dynamics, at times through code switching and at times by openly confronting the men or appropriating male-associated speech forms to demand the floor, neutralize the need for an educational aside on behalf of the man, or respond to what I believe they view as a

face threat to me as a guest. In my conclusion I further explore the implications of the home visit method for data gathering in studies that interview immigrant spouses about matters of ethnicity and identity.

Conclusion

In this paper I have explored the kinds of identity work that older Armenian Iranian immigrants in the US do using language. These identities emerge in response to a myriad factors that converge in one interactional event: the home visit. The caseworker/researcher conducting the home visit acts as a stand-in for US institutions and US mainstream society, which demands by means of a textual and photographic apparatus of stereotypical representation of refugees that Armenian Iranians perform what Khosravi calls "refugeeness" (2010: 73) in order to ensure that their refugee status has been well-deserved. Some Iranian diaspora members' ideas about the "real" lives of Armenians in Iran also implicitly make this demand. During the home visit, however, Armenian Iranians resist these normative demands that they emphaize their marginality and thus disavow their connection to Iran to ensure others that their refugee status is deserved. In this case, the home visit thus offers a chance to examine not only the kinds of factors that bear on ethnic and national identities against the backdrop of migration, diaspora politics, and US institutions, but how speakers negotiate these tensions using language.

At the same time, the more local and temporary aspects of these identities, in particular their gender-relevant aspects, can have implications for who gets the floor and therefore who takes a primary role in the discursive construction of identity during this interface with US institutions. As I have shown, the identity of the caseworker bears heavily on this allocation of symbolic resources as well. In my case, I often ended up subtly or actively reinforcing the man's position as primary speaker and storyteller.

Factors extending beyond language use, such as the spatial arrangement of people and standards of hospitality, also have consequences for how the interactions proceed. Therefore, while the home visit as an ethnographic tool provides a particular kind of insight into the way discursive identity formation can confront certain tensions associated with the migration experience, it is not an ideal method if one wishes to elicit an equal contribution from both spouses.

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